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ABSTRACT

This training manual is designed for use by volunteers, tutors, teachers, and education and training program coordinators who wish to adapt basic literacy instructional skills to street youth. It is not intended to be a stand-alone training program for new volunteer tutors. Major goals are the following: (1) to re-engage street youth in the process of learning and improving their basic skills; (2) to better prepare them to participate in other forms of educational and employment training of their choosing; and (3) to empower them to live more rewarding, personally fulfilling lives. Objectives are to increase the skills of volunteers who work interactively and appropriately with street youth to gain their confidence and cooperation; and to improve volunteers' preparation for providing basic skills training specifically designed for these youth. The approach to basic skills training described here is based on a series of premises derived from research on functional literacy and from the experience and insights of youth social service professionals. The manual is comprised of a series of six modules, each of which focuses on a separate topic; they are intended to be used in the order presented. Topics are the following: (1) Working with Street Youth; (2) Literacy Skills of School Non-Completers and Literacy Practices of Street Youth; (3) Basic Skills Training: Approaches for Street Youth; (4) Determining an Agency Site for Your Work; (5) Putting It into Practice: Basic Skills Training Techniques; and (6) Support Services for Volunteers. (FMW)

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Basic Skills Training For Street Youth

A Manual for Volunteer Tutors

ED306333

Takin' It to the Streets

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Basic Skills Training For Street Youth

A Manual for Volunteer Tutors

Takin' It to the Streets

developed by

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March 1989

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INTRODUCTION

This volunteer tutor training manual is a product of Takin' It to the Streets, a basic skills training project for street youth. The project was funded by the Fred Meyer Charitable Trust to demonstrate a new model for providing basic skills training for these young people.

This Introduction outlines briefly the goals and approach upon which the manual is based and how it is intended to be used.

Goals of the Manual

The street youth population is acknowledged to be in need of basic skills assistance, yet difficult for literacy training organizations and institutions to reach. The unique social characteristics of the street youth group and their special literacy training needs suggest that a specially tailored approach is necessary. Thus, this manual has been written to achieve three major goals:

- To reengage street youth in the process of learning and improving their basic skills;
- To help them be better prepared to participate in other forms of educational and employment training of their choosing; and
- To empower them to live more rewarding, personally fulfilling lives.

To accomplish these goals, the manual seeks to meet two objectives in the training of literacy volunteer tutors:

- To increase the skills of volunteers to work interactively and appropriately with street youth to gain their confidence and cooperation; and
- To improve volunteers' preparation for providing basic skills training specifically designed for these youth.

Premises for the Takin' It to the Streets Training Approach

The approach to basic skills training for street youth described in this manual is detailed in the modules which follow. Briefly, for overview and orientation, the approach followed here is based on a series of premises derived from research on functional literacy and from the experience and insight of youth social service professionals. Among these principles are the following:

- The training should take place at the youth social services agencies where street youth feel comfortable.
- Volunteer tutors should be specially trained to work with street youth.

- The training must be learner-centered to meet the needs, interests, skill levels and pace of each individual youth.
- The training should be focused on functional, real-world tasks and materials that are relevant to these youths' lives.
- The training should identify and build on learners' strengths.
- The training should encourage collaborative learning.
- The training should not be limited to one specific method or set of materials. Because every learner is different, a wide range of methods and materials may be useful.
- Evaluation of the training provided by the volunteers should focus on the process of interacting and the overall learning and reengagement in learning that the youths experience, rather than on the successful achievement of particular goals.

Who Should Use the Manual

The main focus of this manual is on understanding the needs and interests of street youth and adapting basic skills training to address those needs appropriately. It can be used by volunteers, tutors, teachers, and education and training program coordinators who work with street youth or wish to do so. It may be particularly useful to training program coordinators or instructors who wish to extend or improve their outreach to the street youth population.

The manual is not intended to be a stand-alone training program for new volunteer tutors. It does not, for example, provide detailed information on basic literacy instructional strategies. Rather, it proposes ways in which such general strategies can be adapted and made appropriate for working with youth. If you do not have any training or experience in basic skills or literacy tutoring, you will wish to supplement the training in this manual with other tutor training available through your local community college or volunteer literacy organization.

Structure and Use of the Manual

The training manual is comprised of a series of modules, each of which focuses on a separate topic. They are intended to be used in the order presented, each module building on information and activities in the previous sections. The first module introduces you to street youth and the second goes on to discuss the details of youths' uses of literacy and what tutors might expect regarding their skill levels. Module Three then explores various approaches for providing basic skills training to street youth, focusing on the need for this specially designed approach. Based on this background information, the next modules address the specifics of getting started as a street youth tutor. Module Four walks tutors through the process of finding an agency site. The fifth module spells out what tutors will need to do as they prepare for and conduct their initial training sessions with the youth. The final module is intended to provide on-going tutor support. It describes support services available to tutors, either through the agency in which they are placed or through the sponsoring literacy outreach project.

For ease of use the modules are organized in a parallel fashion and divided into color coded sections. Each module begins with a series of "Focus Questions," listed together on the first page of the module for summary and overview and again individually as they appear in turn throughout the module. These Focus Question pages are color coded yellow so that they can be easily recognized.

The Focus Questions provide the basic structure for the modules. Each Focus Question has one or more learning or activity "Objectives," a list of "Critical Points" and a set of "Terms to Know" identified on the yellow sheets. And, on following pages, a set of resource materials is provided -- readings or activities sheets. Each Focus Question Section concludes with a blue color coded section of "Outcomes," thus providing specific activities through which the tutor trainees can assess their comprehension of the Focus Question and/or move forward in the specific steps of establishing a tutoring relationship.

Group or Individual Training

The manual has been designed for maximum flexibility. It is intended to be used by individuals working on their own as well as by groups in a peer-led or facilitator-led workshop setting. The manual was first produced in a draft form and field-tested using both of these training formats. Each proved successful when evaluated by the trainees and the project staff.

An organization might choose to use both the group and the individual format, depending on the background level of the trainees and/or their availability for workshop sessions. Each format has advantages. Use of the individualized approach permits organizations to follow-up with training for volunteers as soon as they express interest, rather than waiting until a minimum number for a workshop series has been assembled. However, the group format offers the advantage of greater interaction and sharing among participants. Suggestions for using each format follow. In any event, the Outcome sections of each Format Question provide both trainee and project coordinator with an assessment of the successful completion of the training.

Workshop Format. To test the draft manual group workshops were set up following standard intensive volunteer training formats: three sessions within a week's time (for example, two evenings of 2.5 hours each and a Saturday morning session of 4 hours). The length of time devoted to each Module varied somewhat with the background of the trainees, but overall the time was fairly equally divided among the Modules. Resource materials in the manual were sometimes discussed in the sessions and sometimes left for individuals to read as auxiliary materials to the workshop topics. Supplementary materials, such as articles from the local press and locally produced videos on street youth, were also incorporated into the training. A fourth session was scheduled the following week, when possible, to supplement the youth training with review literacy tutor training in specific basic skills tutoring techniques appropriate for this population.

Individual Format. Self-study was also field-tested. These individual volunteers met with the project coordinator who previewed the training manual and made suggestions about how to proceed, including the importance of maintaining a fairly rapid and regular pace. The trainees then took the manual for home study, reading all the resource materials, completing the Outcome sheets and reporting back to the project coordinator with questions or comments. At the completion of the self-study the trainee and the coordinator together identified an appropriate placement, based on the Outcome sheets.

It is very important to maintain the structure of completing the worksheets and having regular discussions of the readings with a coordinator, colleagues, or other self-study trainees.

Organizations may consider developing hybrids of the two formats, combining self-study of the manual and materials with a beginning and/or finishing-up group session, so that the trainees get some of the advantages of sharing insights.

You may also find that the manual is useful as an ongoing reference while you work with street youth, checking your perceptions about street culture, reminding yourself of ways to improve communication with your learners, looking up a specific tutoring technique.

We welcome you to this approach for basic skills training for street youth and wish you a stimulating and satisfying training experience.

Acknowledgments

Many people made this tutor training manual possible.

We wish to thank the Fred Meyer Charitable Trust for the opportunity to demonstrate our training ideas.

The foundation for this approach to basic skills training for street youth was a field-based research project funded by the U.S. Department of Education and conducted by staff of the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory in 1985-86. Nancy Faires Conklin was lead researcher and Janise Hurtig conducted the fieldwork. In compiling this manual we have drawn heavily upon the product of that original research, *Making the Connection: A Report for Literacy Volunteers Working with Out-of-School Youth*, by Nancy Faires Conklin and Janise Hurtig, (Portland, OR: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 1986).

Janise Hurtig was also instrumental in advising us in the design of this training demonstration and played a key role in the pilot phase of the demonstration, as well as reading and commenting on the draft version of the manual. We would like to recognize here her professionalism and commitment to providing appropriate, quality services to street youth and the extra energy she gave to the project.

We would also like to extend special thanks to Brian Lacey for his volunteer work with street youth during the training development and pilot testing phases of the project.

We would particularly like to thank the individuals in Portland, Oregon, who have written training materials and conducted workshops to help volunteers prepare to work with street youth. Their insights and materials, based on years of experience with this population, have been especially useful in the compilation of this tutor training manual.

Special thanks to the following individuals for permission to include portions of their work:

Jerry Fest, Yellow Brick Road of Portland and Director, Willamette Bridge;

Judi McGavin, Coordinator of Volunteers, Janis Youth Programs, Inc., Runaway and Homeless Youth Programs;

Barb Sussex, Coordinator of Youth Programs, Outside In;

Molly Worthley, former Director of The Salvation Army Greenhouse

Many of the materials in this manual were excerpted and adapted from the draft version of the Project LUCK training manual, *In and Out of Street Life: Readings on Working with Street Youth*, edited by Debra Boyer (Portland, OR: Project LUCK). We gratefully acknowledge Project LUCK and the Tri-County Youth Services Consortium for permission to use these materials and have cited the draft version in this manual. Thanks especially to Lisa Burk, Project LUCK Coordinator, for facilitating our use of the LUCK draft.

We would like to direct the reader to the published, revised and expanded, version of the Project LUCK training manual: *In and Out of Street Life: A Reader on Interventions with Street Youth*, Debra Boyer, Editor and Contributor (Portland, OR: Project LUCK, 1988). The LUCK manual is available for $10.00 from the Tri-County Youth Services Consortium, 2000 S.W. First, Suite 100, Portland, Oregon 97201.

We would also like to thank Marie Hermanson and Dorothy Brehm of Portland Community College Volunteer Tutoring Program for the use of portions of their *Tutor Handbook* (1987). The *Handbook* is available free from the Volunteer Tutoring Program, Portland Community College, 12000 S. W. 49th, Portland, Oregon 97219. Thanks also to Carolee Schmeer, Alternative Learning Center Specialist, Portland Community College, for her valuable insight into youth learning disabilities.

We are especially grateful to the many youth-serving agency staff in Portland who generously shared their views and experiences with us during this demonstration project, the youth who formed the Youth Advisory Board to guide us in planning the pilot, and the young people who participated in the training.

We would also like to give particular thanks to the volunteers who gave their time, energy and enthusiasm to using these training materials and to applying this basic skills training approach to their efforts to work with street youth. One volunteer, Jane Andrews, was especially dedicated to making this demonstration work. Her unflagging commitment during months of volunteering with little personal reward and her willingness to try yet another idea deserve special mention.

Finally, we acknowledge the professional contributions of Dorothy Erpelding and Danny Vaisanen for producing a high quality draft of this manual and Sally Taylor and Diane Arnold for production of the final revisions.

MODULE ONE

WORKING WITH STREET YOUTH

Developing trust and mutual respect are critical elements in success in any work with street youth. Once you have become more familiar with who street youth are, the family situations they have come from, and why these young people find themselves on the streets, you will be in a position to judge how well you will be able to work with them.

FOCUS QUESTION 1: Who are these youth and why are they on the streets?

Outcome: A list of the three most important facts you learned about street youth.

FOCUS QUESTION 2: What is street culture and how does it affect how I would work with youth?

Outcome: A list of five important concepts about street culture and ideas of how you would use each as you start working with youth on their basic skills.

FOCUS QUESTION 3: How are street youth like and not like other adolescents?

Outcome: A list of three concepts about street youth as adolescents and ideas on how you would apply the concepts to basic skills training.

FOCUS QUESTION 4: What can I expect in working with street youth?

Outcome: A self-assessment that will become a part of your application to work with the Takin' It to the Streets project.

MODULE ONE

Focus Question 1

FOCUS QUESTION 1: Who are these youth and why are they on the streets?

Objective: To become familiar with the reasons why increasing numbers of youth leave school and leave home and how some of them come to live on the streets.

Critical Points

- Many American youth who have the ability to complete school are dropping out before graduation.
- Dropouts often find disappointment in out-of-school life and some end up on the streets.
- Increasing numbers of youth are running away from home because of intolerable family situations.
- Runaways who have no other alternative become street youth.

Terms to Know

Street youth: Young people who have left school and home before the age of 18. They may have been abandoned by their families, or may have voluntarily exiled themselves from the family group. "Street kids" are sometimes called homeless youth.

Runaways: Children who are regarded as "voluntarily missing" from home, who have left without parents' or other caretakers' permission.

Throwaways: Children who have been pushed out of their homes or ignored by their families because they are unemployed, viewed as troublesome, or in conflict with adults. Most throwaways come from dysfunctional homes, commonly characterized by substance abuse, physical or sexual violence, or psychological abuse. Many youth considered as runaways by legal authorities are in fact throwaways.

GED (General Educational Development): The degree of high school graduation equivalency granted to dropouts who complete a course of study and examinations as an alternative to returning to school.

Leaving School[1]

Youth Leave School and Home

Nearly one million 14- to 21-year-olds drop out of middle and high schools each year. The national average rate of high school noncompletion is reported at 26% of all youth. Oregon's noncompletion rate is near the national average: About one in every four Oregon children does not graduate.

Dropouts may have ability. In 1983 a national survey of literacy skills of high school dropouts was conducted (Peng 1983). Well over a third, but less than half of dropouts have been found to be receiving monthly "D" grades when they left school. Over 10% of dropouts report that they were on the honor roll when they left. Even on standardized tests--which generally do not reflect school leavers' full measure of achievement and ability--50% to 70% of dropouts demonstrated ability to complete their studies. Dropping out of school may be less a result of inability to succeed than a result of boys' and girls' disengagement from the educational process and orientation away from school as a central institution and experience in their lives.

Most dropout is voluntary, not disciplinary. While academic failure and dislike of school are the reasons that youth in this national study most frequently cited for leaving school, employment (especially for boys) and family matters (especially for girls) are also significant factors in the decision to leave school (see Table 1.1). Over a third of boys (35.9%) and over a fourth of girls (29.7%) report that they had poor grades--a substantial, but still surprisingly small proportion of dropouts. Thirteen percent of the boys and only 5.3% of the girls had been dismissed. Thus, most of the dropouts would be considered voluntary.

About a third of both the girls and boys responded that "school was not for me," indicating withdrawal from orientation to school. Only relatively few girls (9.5%) had trouble getting along with school staff; however, 20.6% of the boys report that they had interpersonal difficulties with teachers. Generally, more boys' decisions are based on dislike and inability to get along in school.

Dropout in Oregon is for similar reasons. Oregon's Department of Education undertook a detailed examination of early school leavers (Oregon Department of Education 1980). Over 500 dropouts from grades nine through twelve were telephone-interviewed. Like the national study, this state survey sampled only those dropouts who were accessible through their families. Thus, it too omits from consideration youth who have severed ties with their homes. Of the sample, 87.1% were still out of school, but 9.7% were enrolled in GED programs.

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[1] This essay is excerpted and adapted from Nancy Faires Conklin & Janise Hurtig, *Making the connection: A report for literacy volunteers working with out-of-school youth*, pp. 1-44. Portland, OR: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 1986.

Table 1.1

Reasons for Leaving School Reported by a
National Sample of 1980 Sophomores Who Left High School
Before Graduation, Percent Distribution by Sex

Reasons	Male	Female
School-Related		
Expelled or suspended	13.0	5.3
Had poor grades	35.9	29.7
School was not for me	34.8	31.1
School ground was too dangerous	2.7	1.7
Didn't get into desired program	7.5	4.5
Couldn't get along with teachers	20.6	9.5
Family-Related		
Married or planned to get married	6.9	30.7
Was pregnant	N/A	23.4
Had to support family	13.6	8.3
Peer-Related		
Friends were dropping out	6.5	2.4
Couldn't get along with students	5.4	5.9
Health-Related		
Illness or disability	4.6	6.5
Employment		
Offered job and chose to work	26.9	10.7
Other		
Wanted to enter military	7.2	.8
Moved too far from school	2.2	5.3
Wanted to travel	7.0	6.5

n = 1,188 males; 1,101 females

Note: More than one reason may be given; therefore figures do not add to 100%.

Source: Peng 1983:5

Table 1.2 lists some of the findings in response to a query about the Oregon youths' reasons for leaving school. Most dropouts offered multiple responses, leading the surveyors to conclude that "the most dramatic finding in the study was that reasons for leaving school are varied and complex" (p.14). While two-thirds (65.5%) of the reasons cited for leaving school were school-related, only a minority (15.9%) related to academic

Table 1.2

Self-Report of Reasons for Leaving School
in Oregon, 1980

	Percent Distribution of Reasons Cited	Proportion of Sample Citing This Reason
School-Related	65.5	
Academic (24.0)		42.0
Failing grades (1.9)		
Lack credits (0.2)		
Basic skills (0.2)		
Competencies (0.2)		
Incomplete classwork (1.9)		
Difficulty (1.9)		
Conduct standards (14.2)		25.8
Non-attendance (6.6)		
Disciplinary action (4.0)		
Interpersonal relations (10.7)		18.6
School personnel (16.6)		31.6
Advised to leave/not encouraged to stay (3.3)		
Self/Personal	16.1	34.8
Bored/not like school (7.0)		
Physical illness (2.5)		
Family/Home	7.3	15.0
Pregnant (2.3)		
Marriage (1.0)		
Parents not support staying (1.1)		
Financial need (1.0)		
Work/Alternative Education (9.7)	21.6	
Have a job (0.4)		
Plan to work (3.3)		
Alternative education (5.8)		

Note: Since respondents could offer more than one reason, columns do not add to 100%.

Source: Oregon Department of Education 1980:13-15 failure (including failing grades, lack of credits, difficulty, basic skills and competencies, incomplete classwork and school disciplinary actions).

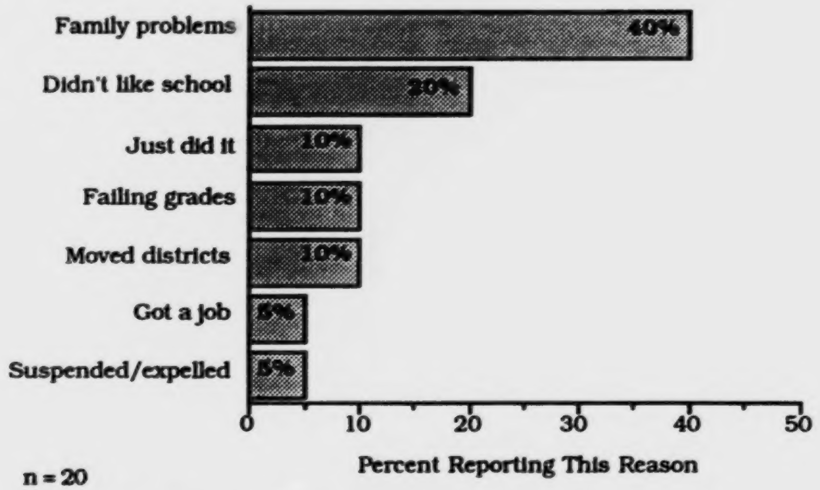
Indeed, less than half (42.0%) of the Oregon study respondents cited any academic reason among the causes for their leaving school. Conduct standards, including compulsory attendance, school regulations, disciplinary actions and other requirements were mentioned by 25.8% of the dropouts. Other school related-reasons were also significant, but, again, not cited by a majority: 18.6% mentioned some problem with interpersonal relations at school (e.g., cliques, feeling out of place) and 31.6% had had problems with school personnel.

Family problems caused street youth to drop out. In the Oregon Department of Education study, home and family problems accounted for just 7.3% of all the reasons for leaving school. Only 15% of the youth responding even mentioned any family or home reasons.

Figure 1.1 reports the results of the same query posed in personal interviews with street youth. It provides a picture of the reasons for leaving school that contrasts with the state survey in Table 1.2 above. The responses displayed in Figure 1.1 come from youth who were excluded in the larger surveys conducted through outreach to families of youth out of school. Asked their main reason for leaving school, these street youth responded with a 15% rate of failure and expulsion. An additional 20% reported that they left because they didn't like school; these may or may not have been failing.

Figure 1.1

Percent Distribution of Street Youths' Reasons for Leaving School



n = 20

Source: Adapted from Conklin and Hurtig 1986:20

But, most significantly, the street youth reported a radically different rate of response for family problems as a cause of school leaving. Fully 40% left school because of family difficulties. These included running away from physical and/or sexual abuse at home, unwanted pregnancy, expulsion from the home, divorce and subsequent shifting back and forth between (apparently unwilling) parents.

An additional 10% of the youth reported that they left school because their families moved from their district and they did not want to attend a new school and enter an unknown social environment. Many of these moves were the result of family breakup or shift of child custody from one parent to the other. For many street youth, leaving school was a secondary effect of leaving home.

Hardships of Life Out-of-School

Youth lack achievable plans. School leavers may articulate positive plans for their life out of school, but, when faced with the difficulties that inevitably await them, they may find it impossible to persevere, just as many found continuation in the school environment impossible. While many youth have well-developed and reasoned motivations for terminating their schooling, they have a less than clear understanding of what life out of school will be like.

For many, their lives--in school and/or at home--are unpleasant, perhaps untenable. The decision to leave school may be made for negative reasons, i.e., to escape to a less bad situation, but it still constitutes a reasonable alternative from the point of view of the young person. Inschool youth have only very limited understanding of how difficult independent living can be. Youth agency staff remark that the easiest way to spot new runaways is the enthusiasm that they have for street life. While seasoned street kids may well say they would rather be there than anywhere else they know, they do not find their lives enjoyable and, indeed, hold starry-eyed newcomers and part-time "weekend warriors" in contempt.

Dropouts are adolescents, and, even more than their age-mates in school, are present-, not future-oriented. Independent planning and weighing among alternatives are not tasks at which they have had a great deal of experience. There is also much about the adult world they simply do not know. While some find satisfactory employment, succeed in an alternative educational program, or make a solid start at family life, many others find that such expectations are not fulfilled.

A survey of dropouts from the Phoenix, Arizona, schools illustrates teens' unrealistic expectations for their out-of-school lives (Phoenix Union High School 1980). Table 1.3 lists dropouts' plans at the time they left school and their actual activities the following fall. Less than half of those who planned to work were employed (52.8% vs. 25.8%). Less than half of those who intended to continue their education were in GED or job training programs (43.5% vs. 21.0%). Only 46.8% of the school leavers reported that they were working or studying and, since some were doing both, the group productively engaged in employment or education constitutes substantially less than half the Phoenix dropouts.

Table 1.3

Early School Leavers' Planned and Actual
Education and Employment Activities

Plans at Time of Dropout			Activities Following Dropout		
Employment		52.8%	Employment		25.8%
Have a job	15.7				
Seek a job	37.1				
Education		43.5%	Education		21.0%
GED	26.6		Work on GED	12.4	
Trade/vocational training	16.9		On-the-job training	8.6	
Other			Other		
No education planned	19.1		"Sit around"	28.1	
"Rest"	15.1		Dropped out of GED/training	14.2	
			In trouble with the law	10.9	

Note: More than one answer may be given, therefore figures do not sum to 100%.

Source: Phoenix Union High School 1980

Dropouts' employment prospects are limited. While the decision to drop out of school may be motivated by the reasonable desire to earn money and at least some expectation that this might be possible, leaving school has dire effects on long-term employability and on lifetime earnings. A national study of young dropouts found that 27% of those wishing to work were unemployed or sufficiently dissatisfied with their work that they were actively seeking employment. The majority regretted having dropped out of school (Peng 1983).

Twenty-five percent of all families headed by school dropouts live in poverty. Female-headed households are most likely to be poor, and those headed by dropout women are by far most disadvantaged: 49% of families headed by female dropouts live below the poverty line (Fine and Rosenberg 1983:264). Dropout girls' workforce participation is lower than that of women overall. A large majority of teen mothers raise their children on welfare. In California, 99% of dropout mothers were drawing public assistance to support their young families (Camp, Gibbs, and Monagan 1980).

Not only are dropouts often without work, they are often seen as unemployable. Thus, while many youths leave school in order to enter the workforce and some are successful in finding and keeping employment, increasing numbers are drifting away from school without any viable alternative, lacking the skills to seek access to the world of work, and, in many cases, lacking an orientation toward employment and the adult world.

Runaways and Throwaways[2]

Scope of the problem. By 1984 the national estimates of runaway youth under the age of 19 were between 730,000 and 1.3 million. Six thousand youth were sheltered by 271 runaway programs in 1985. Drop-in services assisted 305,500 youth and 250,000 young used runaway hotlines. This is a small number of youth served in shelters in light of the estimated 1.3 million who do run away. As many as 600,000 youth may be living on the streets and not served by any social service agency. Of youth surveyed in runaway shelters in 1984, 53% were female and 47% were males (National Network of Runaway Youth Services, 1984).

In Oregon, 10,549 runaways were reported in 1984, rising to 11,691 in 1985. Metropolitan Portland accounted for well over half of these: 7,063 in 1985 (3,993 from Multnomah County, 954 from Washington County and 1,116 from Clackamas County). These numbers are thought to reflect about half the actual total number of runaways.[3]

A variety of studies indicate that runaway youth represent all economic classes and ethnic groups. As many as 80% are victims of physical and sexual abuse, nearly all have suffered emotional abuse and neglect. A study of runaways in Los Angeles County, California, showed that up to 46% of runaways were encouraged or forced to leave home by parents (Brady 1986). From another perspective, 12% of American youth leave home before they are 18, and 3% of families experience a runaway (Garbarino, Wilson and Garbarino 1986).

If we accept the most conservative data, we must still acknowledge the devastating ramifications of well over a million runaways (individuals, not episodes). Runaway youth are at high risk for depression, suicide, prostitution, drug use, and disease. Half of these youth are unlikely to return home or remain in foster care. Few (less than 10%) can be legally emancipated. Approximately 25% of runaways will become identified as street youth and engage in criminal activity and prostitution to survive.

Runaways are decreasingly institutionalized. Changes in juvenile law are at least partially responsible for the increasing numbers of youth who end up on the street. Prior to changes that occurred in the last decade, most juvenile courts had broad powers over youth with relatively free rein to determine what was "in the best interests of the child." Juveniles who had not committed criminal acts were brought before the court and labeled incorrigibles--a catch-all phrase for what is now known as status offenses such as running away or truancy. Youth who ran away, no matter what the cause, were often locked up. At one point, 55% of all juveniles in institutions had committed no crimes, and 90% of females had committed no crimes.

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[2] This section is excerpted and adapted from Robert Deisher & Debra Boyer, Introduction to street youth: A challenge to social services. In D. Boyer (Ed.), *In and out of street life: Readings on working with street youth*. Draft Version. Portland, OR: Project LUCK, 1987. Support for that publication was provided by the National Center for Neighborhood Enterprise through a grant from the Federal Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. Used by permission. Any material added has been footnoted.

[3] Executive Summary, Oregon Runaway and Homeless Youth Act.

States began to shift their philosophy and change laws with the intention of taking dependent youth out of the court system. Unfortunately, most states failed to provide the resources and services needed for dependent youth and status offenders. Many street youth fall into these categories. Most are not serious offenders. In addition, diversion programs often assume a community setting that street youth do not have. Often street youth cycle back to juvenile courts with prostitution charges because they do not have a stable living environment.

Youth run *away*. Running away from home is not new, but our perception of why kids leave home has begun to change. Ten to 15 years ago, it was commonly believed that most teenagers on the run were running *toward* someone or something that they found to be desirable: freedom, excitement, a new philosophy or style of living, independence, a significant relationship or a job. Whether or not this view was once accurate, we no longer make such comfortable assumptions about the motives of today's teenage runaways. Indeed, our studies have led us to the now widely held impression that youth on the run are often running *away*: away from neglect, away from physical or sexual abuse, away from rigid or unstable families, or away from the accumulated despair of lifelong underachievement and poor socializations. In some cases, their parents have thrown them out. The righteous and rebellious dropout of the 1960s is not the same as the throwaway child of the 1980s.

Running is related to home problems. The decision to leave home is not necessarily a bad one, especially in the chronically abusive family settings so typical of the street youth seen by social services. However, insurmountable problems await these young people the moment they actually leave--problems that have only costly and destructive solutions on the street.

Studies of runaways have shown that the more serious the home problems, the more times a child will run away. A national study reported that:

> Youths who have run away only once or twice are more likely to claim that they wanted a new experience than are adolescents who have run away a number of times. Runaways who have left home more than nine times are more likely to implicate alcohol as a very important reason for running away. These youths are more likely than first-time runaways and youth who have left home fewer than nine times to claim physical abuse as a very important reason for running away. The runaways' responses suggest that almost all runaways leave home because of a family situation they find unbearable (National Center for Missing and Exploited Children).

The following chart outlines what is known about youths' patterns of running:

PATTERNS OF RUNNING

Reasons for Running	Beliefs about Reasons for Running	Outcomes of Running
Unhappy life	Events are unpredictable	Repeated returns home, expecting family or personal changes that do not come
Physical/verbal/sexual abuse	The youths blame themselves and others	Increased confusion and sense of personal failure
Family conflict/arguments/fights	Events are under the control of others	Increased reliance on street life
Rigid rules	The youth should be able to control and change events	
Impulse		
Alcohol/drug abuse		
Alienation		

Homeless Runaways Become Street Youth[4]

As youth run away more times, they become more and more likely to bypass the institutional settings of court-mandated group homes, half-way houses, and youth detention centers. They find themselves more and more relying on informal networks for shelter--friends, extended family members, non-profit youth shelters, and the streets.

Survival requires adaptation. There are stages in the runaway experience that eventually lead youth to street life. Youth may leave home to avoid abuse, find acceptance, or be independent, and a few are seeking adventure and fun. Others have been abandoned to the street by dysfunctional or non-existent families and child welfare systems. In each situation youth must survive by coping with and mastering the conditions presented for a runaway. They must adapt to other street people, a different value and behavior system, limited resources, and to their status as both minor and delinquent. Each experience brings new knowledge that alienates them from a previous life and more deeply enmeshes them into an alternative lifestyle and subculture (Palenski 1984).

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[4] This section is excerpted and adapted from Robert Deisher & Debra Boyer, Introduction to street youth: A challenge to social services. In D. Boyer (Ed.), *In and out of street life: Readings on working with street youth*. Draft Version. Portland, OR: Project LUCK, 1987. Support for that publication was provided by the National Center for Neighborhood Enterprise through a grant from the Federal Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. Used by permission. Any material added has been footnoted.

Becoming a street kid is a gradual process. The most benign scenario may include erratic truancy, developing into total disregard for school. Being typically neither good students nor good athletes, school is an alienating experience for most of these young people, a pattern that is generally aggravated in their dealings with school authorities. After a few months of idling at a local video parlor or shopping mall, they may hear about excitement and the availability of drugs downtown. Wary and a bit frightened at first, and shored by the company of similarly alienated friends, they make their first forays into the streets and learn their way around.

Precipitating events such as physical or sexual abuse or dramatic instability at home can propel adolescents into the streets earlier and more irreversibly than when prompted by the insidious onset of alienation. Our experience in Seattle has been that nearly all of our street youth have histories of significant abuse and neglect.

Street options are few. Once on the street, stable employment is rarely a realistic option. Unemployed and unemployable, without experience, education, or confidence, youth quickly gravitate to the illicit activities commonly attributed to the delinquent underworld. Well over 50% of the street youth, both male and female, we have encountered have been involved in prostitution.

Prostitution is only one of many complex and interrelated exigencies that shape the lives of these young people. In spite of the profound desperation which lies at the core of street life, veneer of excitement and camaraderie, combined with overwhelming distrust of adult intervention, can sustain their involvement for years. The secondary effects of this lifestyle are pernicious. At a time when they should be devoting energy to school and the development of meaningful relationships, they are dependent on exchanging sex for livelihood and on drugs for stimulation, social acceptance and coping. They have effectively isolated themselves from the realities and rewards of mainstream life by their resulting daytime sleeping habits and addictive problems.

Their age limits their alternatives. Ironically, youth who reach out for help from social service agencies find their assistance limited by child protective legislation. For example, adult homeless shelters cannot legally accept youth. Youth shelters cannot provide even one night's emergency shelter for young runaways if their parents have filed a "runaway report" with the police until the agency contacts the parents and obtains permission to provide shelter. Contact with parents is often difficult; and permission is sometimes denied.

Youth must be at least 16 years of age to secure a work permit, so, even with the intervention of social workers, they cannot legally be hired by employers. Even to enroll in a GED program, to try to get back to their education, youth under 16 are required to have a parent's or guardian's signature. One social worker reports he must tell younger street kids: "Try to stay alive till you're 16, then come back and we'll apply for emancipation and try to help you."

At the other end of the youth age range, street youth who reach the age of 18 become ineligible for certain services, for example, some counseling designated for youth, legal assistance, and Medicaid. They also become adults in the eyes of the courts if they are picked up for crimes like drug dealing and/or prostitution.

Health is a problem. Life expectancy on the streets is low. There are diseases and there is violence. Youth service workers estimate that street youth only receive about one-third their daily caloric requirements. Their chronic malnutrition leaves them susceptible to various diseases, as does their lack of sleep and warmth.

Youth who are prostituting are vulnerable to communicable diseases, including AIDS. Many are also drug users, further endangering their health.

Youths' Own View of Their Lives

In 1985, many Portland street youth contributed to a writing contest sponsored by Yellow Brick Road of Portland (Fest 1985). The contest was designed to give youth an opportunity to describe their own lives and how they see the world. The samples below will acquaint you with street youth firsthand.

Eassy on Prostitution

> I have been involved in prostitution for going on three years now. I was nearly 15 when I was "turned-out" which is a slang term for beginning to work on the streets. I began because I was on the run and I didn't have any place to stay, or any food to eat no money what so ever. . . . I always told myself, thats fine for them, but I'd never stoop so low. Well, when you're hungry and cold and need a shower and a change of clothes theres not too many alternatives. At least there wasn't for me. One thing I would really like to stress is that not everyone is forced into prostituion, not everyone is hooked on drugs either. As for myself, the first couple of years, I never messed with anything heavier than a little pot. Another thing I want to say is that not everyone has had experiences with Johns or pimps. I have never had anything bad happen to me, except for going to Jail. That was my greatest fear. . . . I have been busted maybe 3 more times since then. It took until last month before they finally figured out all my adult cases & juvenile cases and sent me to ... "school". I have been here for 5 weeks. I am realising that Im a very inteligent person. I got my GED my second week here, and now I am in ... here on campus. I never really loved what I was doing, but I was surviving the best I knew how at the time. At times I would have fun, not on the dates, but just being around other girls, gossping and all the things that girls from all walks of life do. Alot of people would be amazed at how much heart some of the working girls have. I am not trying to glamourize prostitution at all, just expressing how I feel and how I have seen it. I have an 18 month

commitment but I hope to be out of here by my 18th birthday, in August. I don't plan on going back to prostitution, but at least I know whatever happens to me I'll never starve.

Age 17

Adults and the world they've created.

Sometimes I wonder what things will be created by my generation. I mean, thirty years ago there were 200 kinds of drugs, today there are over 400,000. If the last generation produced that, with my generation being so much more educated about drugs, what will it be like 30 years from now?

I spent last year on my own, independent and on the run. I did things some adults will never do. It was fine when kids on TV did it, they had a great time, lived the glamorous life and always, always ended up at home with Mom and Dad. I had to find out the hard way that TV was a fantasy land, made for money. . . .

I remember last year. It's hard to be happy when everywhere you go there are images of dead children on the sidewalk. I know about nuclear war, oh God do I know. I've gone through my adolescence hearing about it. I'm 16 years old, I should be worrying about what I'm going to wear tomorrow or what my grades are going to be. Instead I worry about whether I'll die before I've had a chance to live.

Age 16

Street Survival

I don't enjoy living on the streets but I can't seem to find any other choice at the moment. It's very difficult trying to survive on your own when you have no job, no way of supporting yourself. We have to rely on friends, relatives or other forms such as The Greenhouse. For many of us The Greenhouse is our only means of eating. It's not easy waiting until six o'clock to eat. We go through our day hungry, bored, and most of the time not very happy. I am very thankful for places like The Greenhouse because without them there's no way we could make it. Living on the streets gets really depressing. We go day by day wondering where we're going to stay or how we're going to pay our rent at a crummy hotel. For a lot of people getting money means selling drugs, stealing, or prostitution. I don't do any of those so of course I never have any money. . . . My life was a lot better when I was going to school. I hated the classes but I still had fun. I was involved in drama, choir, and lots of school plays. I did things with friends on the weekends, and was basically happy. Living on the streets brings me down more than I ever imagined. When I first went downtown I had fun but after almost two years I hate it. I want a job and a place to live as far away from downtown as possible. . . . I would not advise anyone to runaway to downtown. If I had a choice I would be at home. Surviving on the streets is not easy and it isn't fun. I know it's made me miserable!

Age 20

STREET SURVIVAL

STREET SURVIVAL IS TOUGH! I KNOW BECAUSE I'VE BEEN THERE. MY NAME IS S.T. REET. . . . I'VE BEEN ON THE STREETS SINCE I WAS TWELVE YEARS OLD. I RAN AWAY FROM A GROUP HOME IN [__]. I WAS ALWAYS HANGING AROUND DOWNTOWN TRYING TO GET MONEY FOR FOOD. I COULDN'T GET AJOB BECAUSE I WAS TO YOUNG AND EVERYBODY KNEW THAT I WAS A STREET CHILD. I HAD TO STEAL FOR A LIVING. . . . THERE WAS A COUPLE OF TIMES WHEN I WOULDN'T HAVE TO SLEEP OUT IN THE RAIN OR UNDER A BRIDGE.THERE WERE SOME PROSTITUTES THAT SYMPATHEIZED WITH ME AND LET ME STAY WITH THEM FOR A COUPLE OF DAYS. THERE WERE TIMES WHEN I FELT LIKE JUMPING OFF THE [__] BRIDGE INTO THE [__] RIVER. THAT'S HOW BAD IT IS. SOME TIMES I WOULDN'T GET ANY MONEY FOR DAYS ON END AND FELT LIKE DOING SOMETHING REALLY DRASTIC LIKE SELLING MYSELF OR ROBBING A BANK BUT I DIDN'T. I'D JUST GO STEAL A PURSE OR SUCKER A MALE HOMOSEXUAL. IT AIN'T EASY ON THE STREETS: YOU GOTTA BEG TO SURVIVE. AS A CERTAIN ROCK SONG GOES "I'VE BEEN KICKED, I'VE BEEN BEAT, I'VE BEEN TOSSEDINTO THE STREET, BEGGING NICKELS, BEGGING DIMES, JUST TO GET MY BOTTLE OF WINE". . . . WHEN I RAN AWAY FROM ANOTHER GROUP HOME I STOLE $1200 FROM THIS ONE DUDE. I GAVE HALF OF IT TO TWO LESBIANS I WAS STAYING WITH AND THE OTHER HALF I USED TO BUY TWO ONE-WAY PLANE TICKETS TO [__]. FIRST THING I DID WHEN I GUT IN [__] WAS BUY A GUN. I CAN HANDLE A GUN PRETTY WELL AND I DON'T HAVE NO QUALMS ABOUT SHOOTING SOMEBODY. I'VE BEEN SHOT AT AND I'VE SHOT AT. LET ME TELL YOU IT AINT'T NO FUN.

I DON'T THINK I'LL EVER BE ABLE TO LEAVE THE STREETS UNLESS THEY COME UP WITH A PROGRAM TO GIVE KIDS LIKE ME AND THOSANDS OF OTHER KIDS LIKE ME A PLACE TO STAY. GROUP HOMES DON'T DO THE JOB RIGHT. I'VE HEARD STORIES ABOUT A PROGRAM CALLED [__] THAT GIVES JOBS AND FREE ROOM AND BOARD TO KIDS OVER SIXTEEN AND THAT AREN'T RUNAWAYS. BUT WHAT ABOUT THE ONES UNDER SIXTEEN WHOO AREN'T SIXTEEN AND THE

RUNAWAYS. THEY NEED A PLACE TO STAY AND A JOB TO EARN SOME MONEY SO THEY CAN BUY CLOTHES AND OTHER NECESSITIES. MAYBE THERE ARE SOME ADULTS THAT CAN HERE MY PLEA FOR HELP AND DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT. ALSO, MAYBE THERE ARE SOME KIDS OUT THERE THAT WILL TAKE HEED TO THIS RECALL OF MY TIMES ON THE STREETS. THANK YOU FOR TAKING SOME TIME OUT TO READ THIS.

Age 16

Street Survival: What is life like on the Street

Survival, well it's not really called that, not with the streets anyway. It's really called a struggle. . . . Most kids go to the streets, because home is too much. But after they hit the street, home is their dream. "You can't go back." Thats what everyone says. When you hear it from friends, people you don't even know, it becomes the only thing you understand. You see things that you wouldn't even read in a book or see on a horror film. People actully killing for drugs, boose, money, or sex. Or watching your best friend sell her body for your drug habbit. Sleeping in doorways, and then being knocked cold for some junkie, so he could have your coat. Sometimes People will feel sorry for you, and give you money, or a friend you had, before you took your one and only trip for life, will lend you money or a place to stay. Your only trip... Sometimes you foret the pain, or it goes cold, in the warmth of an old friend; but a street, can take the love from you, and leave you lonely. Days aren't so bad. Kids you went to school with are there. You act tough, look dead, and feel like you could cry. You don't have friends on the streets, you have a owner, and a loner. No way to look at it, either your up for grabs by cops, or by your dealer, or at your pimps convience. . . .

This is what it's like in the streets. It's rough and dangerous. People are turned out by family and so-called friends. It was what we wanted until we got there. And then home was what we would die for.

Age not given

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MODULE ONE

Focus Question 1

Outcome

FOCUS QUESTION 1: Who are these youth and why are they on the streets?

Outcome: A list of the three most important facts you learned about street youth.

Instructions: Think over what you have learned about youth who have left school and left home. List here three facts you think are most important for preparing for work with street youth.

1.

2.

3.

MODULE ONE

Focus Question 2

FOCUS QUESTION 2: What is street culture and how does it affect how I would work with youth?

Objective: To become familiar with the alternative culture within which street youth live, why it is an essential expression for the youth, and how it causes them to act in their relations with outsiders.

Critical Points

- Youth on the street create close ties with one another, often experiencing "family" for the first time.
- Street culture is expressed in the high value youth place on their own sense of integrity, trust, worthiness, and resourcefulness.
- Even more than other adolescents, street youth live only in the present.
- Street youth present themselves as invulnerable, but they can easily feel threatened and act out violently.
- Youth try to create a new identity on the streets, often adopting special street names.
- Youth on the streets can only earn money illicitly and have a weak sense of ownership, even of themselves.
- Volunteers working with street youth must overcome youths' prior and current negative relations with adults through integrity and patience.

Street Culture[1]

Introduction

What do I mean by street culture and what does it mean for services? There are many definitions of culture. It is useful to think of culture as those meanings and perceptions shared by a group of people that guide behavior. People who share a culture tend to perceive the world in the same ways. The difference between cultures is not the world they live in, but rather the way they perceive that world.

Thus, the first thing you need to have in order to work with members of another culture is an understanding of their perception of the world around them. If you lack such an understanding, not only will your work be frustrating and unproductive, you may actually do some unintentional harm. Once we become more aware of how street youth perceive the world, our frustrations decrease and results improve.

Family

> Even if I didn't have my natural family, I have brothers and sisters down here than mean a lot to me and who I love a lot. I read an article in the paper about street life that said the street kids have families and they put it down and said that we don't care about each other in reality. The is really a bunch of shit and makes me mad, because I know I have friends I have helped out and I know their family wouldn't do it for them. An I've never asked for nothing back. I've gotten ripped off by people and used and been through a lot, but its all been worth it becuase I've gained some true friends from it, who I know would help me out anytime or give me the protection I need. The people down here that are my family are my reality family because they can understand my lifestyle because they live the same way.
>
> Female 17
> On The Street

A failed home family. Families are the foundation for human interpersonal relationships. The "need" for family reflects a person's innate need to belong to a group. "Family" is the group of people with whom we establish long-term relations, unconditional support, and acceptance. For street youth, however, the family unit has often failed to meet these needs. Instead of growing up with a secure sense of belonging, the youth may have felt different or unwanted. Love may have been part of a package deal that included physical, sexual, or emotional abuse.

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[1] This entire essay is abridged from Jerry Fest, Street culture. In D. Boyer (Ed.), *In and out of street life: Readings on working with street youth*. Draft Version. Portland, OR: Project LUCK, 1987. Support for that publication was provided by the National Center for Neighborhood Enterprise through a grant from the Federal Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. Used by permission.

With the family needs unmet, youth are extremely vulnerable to the "family" offered by street culture. They may feel an immediate kinship with other kids on the street. Without questions or conditions they find themselves being cared for and accepted. At last, they feel they finally belong to a group.

The street family. A youth's street family can be very confusing for us in the service setting. You will hear kids talking about their "brothers" and "sisters" on the streets. If you don't know what they are talking about, you may think their entire family is out there. Usually, they are not referring to biological family members, but rather adopted members of their street families. Fictive kin will include "moms" and "dads" as well as siblings, but in practice operate more like an extended family system. To the youth the street family is very real and very important.

Street peers are "family." Misunderstanding the street family is a common mistake made when we work with street youth. For example, it is common to attack youth's peers as "bad influences." However, in terms of self-image and ability to survive, a street family may be one of the more positive influences in the lives of youth. It is often the case that youth are alive today because of protection they have from their street family.

The street family can also work against a youth who is trying to leave the streets. The situation is similar to lobsters in a basket. You never need to cover a lobster basket because as one tries to get out the others drag it back down. This isn't because they want to keep all of their buddies in the basket, but rather because they are all trying to get out at the same time. Kids on the street are like lobsters in that respect.

Sometimes you will hear street youth complain about their street friends. This may cause us to breath a sigh of relief and go into our "bad influence" routine, but resist the temptation to do that. Street families, like biological family systems, have rivalries and jealousies and petty disputes. Although it is okay for youth to attack their family, it is not all right for you to do so. It is vital to understand that the street family system is every bit as real and important as a biological family to youth.

Belonging. Belonging is a part of the concept of family as it relates to the behavioral expectations of belonging to a street family. In addition to belonging, we need to feel important and that we are fulfilling a unique and needed role. If we were to go away, someone else may be able to fill the void, but it would be different and our presence would be missed. One youth put it this way:

> I left town for a while and went to ... and I like it there, but I didn't know anyone and I was unhappy there. It felt good to be able to come back home, even if it is the streets, and realize that I have so many friends and that they noticed me gone and missed me. Having that in my life means more than money or any diploma.

Whatever makes us feel needed affects our self-image. An adolescent prostitute, for example, may feel "needed" by the tricks on the street. A steady or "regular" customer may fulfill this need to an even greater degree. But, this type of expression of "need" will not affect the youth's self-image positively, and therefore will fail to feel satisfying.

"My friend" is myself. As adults, we have many options for fulfilling the need to belong. A youth on the streets, however, has virtually no "untainted" options. A way of compensating is found in what I call the "my friends need help" principle. Almost all street youth present an image of "I can take care of myself," "I got it all together," but can just as quickly point out two or three friends who "really need help." It is often the case that the problems they are identifying in their friends' lives are also problems in their own life. It is easy to make mistakes in this situation. The usual mistake is to discount their concern for their friends and to confront them about their own problem. This will cause youth to be upset, scared and to withdraw.

When a kid comes to you with a "my friend needs help" situation, they are asking you to help them fulfill a conceptual need. They need your help in creating a situation that will make them feel good about themselves. This outcome alone would justify a change in the traditional approach, but there are additional benefits as well. Remember, the goal of advocacy is to teach youth to advocate for themselves. We are not trying to make these kids dependent on us. We want the opportunity to educate about problem solving skills.

You should also bear in mind that trust is a key issue with street youth. Sometimes the youth may need to test you with someone else's problems before trusting you with their own. It may also be that the "friend" may not really exist, or may be a third-person account of the youth's own problems.

Street Code: Values and Language

All cultures have codes of conduct that govern relationships between members. The uninitiated observer of the streets may see a completely unstructured and chaotic environment, but behaviors and activity are regulated by an unwritten set of rules. An awareness of the behavioral code of street culture can serve to explain seemingly "irrational" behavior and can enhance your ability to deal effectively with street youth.

"Don't rat." "Don't rat" is a self-explanatory code that is responsible for most of the conflict street youth have with adults and conventional society. The problems generated by the "don't rat" code are compounded by relations with street families and the need to belong. The youth whose self-image is largely invested in the "my friend needs help" concept is also painfully aware of the lack of "intra-cultural" services and assistance. Faced with problems that even adults find difficult, the youth becomes all but powerless to act without the aid of adults outside the street culture. Youth are forced to deal with people and services they do not trust.

A further complication lies in the need of services to justify funding via documentation. This results in the youth coming in for help and finding themselves immediately barraged by questions. The youth is placed in an ethical bind of having to "rat" in order to help. It is this conflict between needs and ethics that is at the root of the "approach/withdrawal" behavior we see in street youth in the service setting and why service providers label kids as "unmotivated."

The impact of ethical conflict for youth can be reduced by being extremely sensitive when requesting screening information. It is true that we need a great deal of information from youth. Rarely is it the case that we need it all at once. It is a good practice to limit requests for information to what is actually necessary to meet the immediate need, and to leave other questions unanswered until later. Besides, the information is likely to change and you will get more reliable information after you have formed a relationship with the youth. Remember, one of your first goals is to keep the kid coming back.

"Do what you need to survive." On the street, activities are not judged by a conventional moral or legal status, but by how they contribute to survival. As one young person stated:

> I'm a very open person and I take people for what's inside, not what they do. I know guys who pull dates [prostitute], but I'm close enough to them to know that they do it for survival. I have a close friend who I seen catching dates and he had a girlfriend who he could have put out to do the same. But he cared about her enough to do it himself and did not enjoy it. And he started to explain what he was doing and I said hey, I'm your friend, everyone has to survive somehow, I care about you, not how you get your money.

When we speak of survival on the streets, we mean survival in a very literal sense. Kids die on the streets. They are beaten, raped, shot, knifed, and exposed to the elements. They suffer from malnutrition, infection, disease, and neglect. They live in a 24-hour outlaw world of drugs, prostitution, burglary, and violence. They confront these situations with the psycho-emotional maturity of a hurt and abandoned adolescent. What is surprising is not that so many die, but rather that so many more survive. It is the code of survival that allows youth to break through moral and legal barriers to live.

Death on the streets is an integral part of daily life and justifies a corollary code: Don't interfere with someone's survival. Don't interfere with survival no matter how much it tugs at your heart. *Your* status in adult society will not protect them on the streets.

Youths value their sense of personal integrity. A mis-understanding of integrity in street culture is responsible for many conflicts and negative attitudes workers experience with street youth. Conflict arises when workers view youth behavior as manipulative or dishonest, and the youth becomes righteously indignant, feeling that their integrity is being questioned or denied. Integrity is highly valued on the street, but there are important differences between the street concept of integrity and ours.

For street youth, the meaning of integrity is very literal. As adults we are more verbally skilled and therefore exercise a much broader use of language. We become adept at implying more than is said and reading between the lines. Kid's can't do that; kids tend to be more literal than adults.

Youths' language is literal. The literal use of language is carried by street youth well into adolescence and makes up a large part of their concept of integrity. If youths claim to have done something, chances are they are being honest with you. You cannot, however, read between the lines or assume anything is implied in their statement. For example, if you ask a youth, "Did you go to the employment office today?", and they say, "Yes," do not assume that they saw the employment counselor. Do not even assume that they went inside the building. It is possible that they got off the bus at the employment office and left. But they were not dishonest with you. All you asked was: "Did you go?"

You must interpret literally every word out of the kid's mouth. You, in turn, must respond in a clear, precise, and literal manner. Anything less may be interpreted as questioning their integrity, their wholeness, and their need to feel respected and valued.

Understanding the concept of integrity in street culture can make sense out of non-sensical situations:

> One day an 18-year old came to see me at the drop-in center and was fighting back tears. Street youth are often so cut off from their emotions that crying was an indication of a very serious need. I was thinking that she had come to me for counseling so at an appropriate moment, I started to offer some feedback. She abruptly cut me off with a blunt "Fuck you, Jerry! You're not listening to what I'm saying." This happened twice.
>
> I sat back and went over my street culture training, desperately seeking a concept that would fit. When I got to the part about how literal they were, it occurred to me that she had said the exact same thing each time she bit my head off. In effect, every time I started talking, she reminded me that I wasn't listening. Maybe, I began to think, this kid doesn't want to be counseled. Maybe she just wants a safe place to fall apart and just wants me to be there. I decided my best course of action was to sit back and shut up.
>
> For two hours I didn't say one single word, not even a grunt. At the end of this time she came over and held on to me for about five minutes. She then stood up and began to walk away, pausing for a moment to turn to me and say, "You know, that's what I like about you. You're not real quick, but you can usually figure out what's going on."

Time

Street youth possess a normal adolescent view of time that is distorted by other factors. Street youth have experienced major traumas in their lives. Even the very few that were not overtly abused before hitting the streets have become traumatized by the cycle of abuse on the street. Any victim of a trauma will develop a screened memory. This screening function enables victims to cope by eliminating parts of the trauma they cannot handle. However, the result of screening is gaps in their memories that affect their view of the past and interpretation of the present.

Past. For street youth, the past is not a continuum at all, but rather a big storage area. Once something slips into "the past" it is not placed in order, but is part of a jumbled mix of other past events. It makes it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to relate events to each other sequentially. The kid might talk about something that happened last year as though it happened last month, or vice versa. Often workers feel youth are being evasive or manipulative. But youth may be quite incapable of recalling events in any other matter.

Present. The concept of present is the immediate present, what the youth can hear, see, and feel. It is a concept of present that at best spans only hours, and often only minutes. Once an event slips from where a youth can see, hear, or touch it, it lands in the storage area of the jumbled past.

Future. I have separated the concept of future from the concepts of past and present for one very simple reason. For all intents and purposes, there is no future. The future does not exist and, therefore, it is not a medium that can be addressed.

There are many reasons why the future is not a viable concept for street youth. One is simply that street youth are adolescents and tend to view the future as an inconceivable period of time. But, there are some additional factors as well. Consider the very real danger of street life. The need to be constantly alert in order to survive keeps you constantly anchored in the present. Also, with death as a constant companion, tomorrow becomes a very uncertain aspect of your life. There is also the belief that the future may be a mirror image of your past. Considering the traumatic nature of the past, street youth choose not to look ahead to more pain.

Conflict with timing in service delivery. The concepts youth hold toward the future make long-range planning nearly impossible. There are tremendous problems with our appointment-oriented service delivery system. When a kid comes to you requesting a service and is told that they have an appointment in two weeks, the kid will react as though the service has been denied. Often we have put tremendous energy into networking and advocacy in order to get an appointment that quickly, and feel resentful when the kid isn't grateful. The kid, however, after putting enough trust in you to request the help, feels resentful when the service is "denied."

It's important to realize that youth will often not be aware of their particular perception of the future. They will often accept the appointment, and simply not show up. At the time they accepted the appointment they may have been thinking that when the time came they would feel as they do now, or perhaps they believed that the time never would really come. They may also have accepted in order to please you, but were never really thinking that they would have to follow through; it was for them an inconceivable period of time.

When you are working with street youth and adolescent prostitutes you will have to adjust your methods to be as present minded in your service delivery as possible. "Do it now" should be your guiding motto. If you can't, you may want to consider the following:

> Sometimes when a kid asks me to get an appointment, I will explain that such appointments are difficult to get quickly and I will promise to work on it. I will

then set up the appointment that day. I will then continue to tell the kid that I'm working on it while I set shorter-term appointments with the kid to keep them coming back. When the appointment is a day or two away, I will then tell them about it, and help them to keep it. This helps the kid from getting discouraged by having to confront long-term future commitments.

Street Attitudes

Cockiness. For anyone who has worked with street youth for more than five seconds, there is no need to explain what I mean by cocky behavior. But, cocky behavior is almost universally misunderstood. Adults often take this behavior personally, feeling that the kid is rejecting them by being cruel, ungrateful, rude, and a know-it-all smart-ass who obviously doesn't care about you or anything you're doing. In reality, the kid is just plain scared. The usual cause of cocky behavior is that the kid is almost never in an equalitarian relationship with any member of adult society. The cocky behavior is used as protection by elevating their status when faced with a superior who is threatening or belittling them.

When a kid is acting cocky and directing it at you, assume that something you are doing is threatening. It does not have to be conscious or malicious on your part. The tone in your voice might be the same as a date of theirs who likes to indulge in sexual humiliation. The way you are standing in the doorway might be the same way her father stood just before she was beaten and raped. You must always remember that you don't know what you are doing. If you step on one of those emotional mines it will blow up, and either you, the kid, or both will get hurt.

Knowing that cocky behavior signals a scared kid opens up solutions. The best way to de-escalate the situation is to use the behavior as your signal to show the kid respect and deference. Too often we respond to the behavior, when we should be responding to the need. One of the most important things you can do is not to take the behavior personally. Even if you don't get an opportunity to show respect and turn the situation around, the kid won't hang on to their anger if you don't. Street youth are angry and usually have a right to be so. By making it safe for them to vent anger without jeopardizing relationships, we provide a much needed service.

Prejudice. Prejudice is similar to cockiness, except that it is used when there is no convenient target for feelings. It is almost never necessary to attempt to deal with the prejudice of street youth because it is not at all what it seems. Street youth may be the most non-judgmental population you will ever meet, in spite of the fact that they are verbally quite prejudiced. You will notice, however, that the same kid who unleashes a scathing verbal assault against "niggers" or "spics," will also have very close black and Mexican friends on the street. Verbal prejudice erupts as part of the degrading nature of street life and prostitution. The verbally prejudiced youth is responding to feelings of degradation. Prejudice is used as a method of relieving the degradation by passing it on, and feeling that someone or something is lower than they are.

Violence. For reasons of personal safety, if nothing else, anyone working with street youth should have an awareness of their capacity for violence and the ways in which it is precipitated. No matter how much you may care about these kids, the reality is they can be violent. Since violent behavior is complicated by distorted concepts of cause and effect, it can result in serious injury, or even death. It is not uncommon for kids to carry weapons. At the drop-in center we ask them to give up their weapons before coming inside. We see a wide variety of knives, clubbing weapons, numchucks and other martial arts hardware, and have even had encounters with firearms. The good news is that most violent behavior is avoidable if underlying causes are understood.

A basic cause of violence is the danger of street life--remember the code of survival. The streets are inherently dangerous. One of the ways you survive in a violent culture is to avoid violence by being constantly prepared for violence. If you're out there backing down and being a wimp, you will be taken advantage of and physically hurt.

Youth will be very cocky and threatening in order to avoid violence. But, if the situation doesn't de-escalate it will at some point come down to a point of integrity and the kid will just blow. *Never put a youth in a position to "put up or shut up."* The kid will "put up" every time. Instead of pushing, it is often advisable to just "back off" for a few minutes, let the situation settle into the past, and then try to deal with it. I'm not suggesting you back down; I'm just suggesting that you back off, and give the kid a way out other than violence.

The concept of time plays a role in understanding most, if not all, behaviors you will encounter. The secret weapon that gives you the edge is your ability to work on issues indirectly, by allowing situations to settle into the kid's past, while it remains in your present.

Identity

The identity most youth bring with them to the streets has been shaped by abusive experience. This is not a self-image conducive to street survival. As a result, young people will begin to accept a new identity as they become enmeshed in the street subculture. Sometimes this new identity will be based on minor distortions of who they are and what they've done. In other cases, the youth may adopt a completely new past, bearing no relation to their actual life experience.

Youth create street names. An obvious manifestation of identity adoption is the use of street names. Though not used in every circumstance, the majority of street youth have a street name that becomes very significant to them. Sometimes it is a normal name such as Mark or Sue, although it has no relation to their birth name. The name may have more obvious connotations of life on the street such as Angel, Crystal, or Rabbit. The entire self-concept of youth may be connected to their street name. It is often the foundation of their street identity. Challenging the validity of the street name may weaken their character armor and undercut their ability to survive on the street.

Street names are not chosen haphazardly. You can sometimes learn quite a bit about youth by exploring the origin of their street name. I knew one girl named "Thumper," and had assumed the name was taken from that cute little rabbit in "Bambi." When I talked to her about it, I discovered she had been given the name because she used to carry a steel ball which she used to "thump" people. Knowing this, a whole new area of counseling opened up and we began to deal with her anger and violent behavior.

As you develop a relationship with youth, you will learn their street name and their real name. It is necessary to know when to use which name:

> An outreach worker, who had originally met a girl by her street name, was eventually told her real name. The next day he saw her out on the street and, in an attempt to establish a bond, addressed her by her real name. The girl immediately withdrew and didn't speak to him for about a month. In her mind he had betrayed a confidence because he should have known not to use her real name on the street.

Lying. A lie is a deliberated, intentional falsehood, something that is known by the utterer to be contrary to fact. Most "lies" told by street youth are related to survival and can often be untruths that the youth believes. Even if the youth is aware on some level that the utterance is not true, there may still be reasons why it is not exactly a lie.

Like street names, street stories relate to the adoption of a street identity. If you are going to discard your identity as an abuse victim, you need to create and internalize a new set of life experiences for yourself. Street stories help bolster the identity youth need on the street, and act as a "band-aid" for the gaps in their screened memory. Street stories or creative interpretations of reality find credibility by filling in the gaps of the screened memory. It does not feel like an untruth to the kid, but rather a filling of a void. This makes it possible for the youth to believe a little of what they are telling you.

Dealing with these creative realities is often a "catch-22." If you respond as though you believe the stories, you will be communicating that you don't really understand. Somewhere deep down inside they know the story is not true and they will feel misunderstood. If, on the other hand, you challenge the story, then you are setting up a confrontation in which you are calling the kid a liar. Neither approach does you or the kid any good, so it is often best not to react at all. Simply listen and respond when the information is real. There will be times when youth need to lie to you in order to feel safe. Adults working with street youth will have to learn to accept certain types of dishonest responses as one of their survival skills.

Economics

Some youth make money. Many street youth are regularly involved in prostitution, and have an immediate earning capacity that is greater than most of ours. It is possible to earn $200, $300, even up to $500 a night prostituting. The question is, what happens to their money, and why do they need so much help from us? We are told they don't want to be on the street. Well, if they can make $500 a night, why don't they just save their money for a month or two, buy a condominium and retire? This attitude evaporates when you understand that you cannot buy your way off the streets.

The ability to make a lot of money is very inconsistent. Most kids will be making far less. Those that do consistently bring in large amounts of money are more often than not working for a pimp. If that's the case, then they really aren't making a dime. And, the kid who does manage to make a large chunk of cash at night will almost always be broke again the next day. Why? There are several reasons.

Street life is expensive. Most of the kids will purchase meals in restaurants that easily run $20 a day. They usually live in motel rooms rented by the night. Even if the youth could somehow conceive of a monthly commitment, it is next to impossible to find someone who will rent to them. This means food and shelter costs are about $35 a day. With the necessity of drugs for maintaining the lifestyle (after you turn enough tricks to get your place to stay for the night you need to get loaded) you can add about $25 a day for a light user of pot and alcohol. The final tab comes to a low estimate of $80 a day just to meet basic needs.

Spending is important. Street youth also have exaggerated psychological and emotional needs met by money. For example, spending money is one of the few ways street youth have of gaining respect from the society they live in. When they walk up to a cash register with a ten-dollar bill in their hand, they are called "sir." They, in effect, are buying respect. Money also empowers the youth to help friends.

Youth involved in prostitution will use money as a means of psychological cleansing. An adolescent prostitute will look at their dollar and see a blow job, or an ass fuck, and it's degrading. They feel an overwhelming need to get rid of it, and to "cleanse" themselves by passing on the degradation the money represents. This is one of the primary reasons why the adolescent prostitute is unable to hang on to money.

Ownership of property. Another concept one needs to understand is the way street youth conceptualize property and ownership. Their property related behaviors that give adults pause include an apparent lack of desire to hold on to possessions (at the drop-in center we are always giving kids clothes, only to have them return the next day needing more); a lack of respect for private property; and the ease with which they are able to justify shoplifting and theft.

Concepts of ownership on the street can be summed up by the old saying "Possession is nine-tenths of the law." If you have it--regardless of how it was obtained--it's yours, and if you don't, it's not. It will be difficult to change this attitude until street youth are able to develop a belief that they own themselves.

Ironically, the street concept of ownership results in feeling that you never really own anything. Ultimately, all possessions (including your life and body) are subject to someone else's desire. A way of compensation may include an extreme attachment to some little object or article of clothing. The object itself may change, but you will see strong attachment to something. This feeling stems from their need to own something. No matter how unimportant the object appears to us, if it's important to them, it should be treated with great respect.

They must "own" their physical space. It is important to be careful about the manner in which you physically interact with street youth. All physical contact should be with their permission. I am always receptive to physical contact, but will never initiate it without asking permission and I do so in such a manner that youth may comfortably deny it. It is most important that they learn to have absolute control over who, how and when they are touched. If they don't, they will never develop a healthy concept of ownership.

Theft expresses a need for ownership. I have been working with street youth for many years and have done some pretty stupid things. I've had kids staying in my home, and have even left kids alone in my home for extended periods of time. Although street youth are considered a criminal population, I have never been ripped off by a kid. Not once. I never put myself or my property at risk unless I have taken the time to develop a strong relationship with a particular kid. At that point, my friendship is more important than my property, and the kid will not risk one for the other.

Although I have never been ripped off, I have had kids steal little objects from me. Often they are trivial insignificant things that I don't even miss for awhile, if ever. Sometimes they are as trivial as a pencil. Still, many adults are annoyed by this behavior. When you consider the youth's concept of ownership and the value placed on objects, this behavior translates as their desire to have and hold on to a little piece of you. In this light, it is actually more of a compliment than anything else. I keep my office full of little unimportant objects that I don't care if I lose. It becomes a measure of success in relationship building when I see one disappear. I have even had the experience of seeing small objects anonymously appear in my office. Those objects get prominently displayed as an unspoken message to the giver that I understand and accept them in my life.

Relations with Adults as Inter-Cultural Relationships

Another aid to understanding the behaviors and attitudes of street youth is found in the relationship between street culture and conventional adult society. The streets cannot be considered a culture unto themselves, but rather represent a sub-culture of conventional society and the adult world. Recognizing that the street sub-culture exists within and as a part of adult society is necessary for understanding how adult culture impacts youth on the streets.

Perceptions of adults. Youth on the street relate directly to our parent culture primarily as a result of their interactions with adults. There may be gray areas of the following categories, but it is useful to see adults in their lives as falling into one of three groups:

- **Exploiters:** It is the view of youth that everyone is out to get theirs and this is how the world works. Exploiters include adults who have used and abused kids in the past, as well as adults who participate in the continuing cycle of abuse on the streets. Anyone who uses kids for any type of self-gratification or promotion would fall into this category. The wide variety of "respectable" people who fall into this category can be extremely alienating to these kids.

  Other adult exploiters include insensitive reporters who use the open wounds of kids in the media. Rarely is any consideration given to how media attention may affect the kid. The reporter may get a good story, but the kid has been placed at risk. Curiosity seekers will also fall into this category. It is one of the problems with news reports that they tend to advertise the areas where the kids are hanging out. Invariably people start coming hoping to see or talk to a prostitute.

- **Authoritarians:** This category includes the police, the juvenile justice systems, and various other agencies and institutions that exercise some kind of legal authority over youth. The message kids get from this group is that they are bad and need to be punished. This attitude often creates a martyr complex where youth feel they are being singled out and punished for the crimes of the larger society. After all, it is not the dates and exploiters who are being arrested and incarcerated. It is the kids. This is especially damaging in the light of the fact that kids already think of themselves as "bad" or "soiled."

- **Rescuers:** This category includes non-authoritarian sorts of social service systems, as well as well-intentioned groups and individuals who want to help street kids. The message to kids is that there is something wrong with them and they need to be "made better." They are inclined to distrust the representatives of a society that placed them in the situation in the first place.

  Many groups or individuals who present themselves to kids as rescuers turn out to be exploiters. The righteously religious who need to save someone from their sins in order to save themselves end up receiving more than they give. The kid has to go out there on the street that night and "sin" to survive. Adults feel better, but kids feel worse. It is not surprising that the religious approach can become a "red flag," leaving youth very confused about true intentions.

Street culture could not exist without adult participation and support. One of the most difficult things for me personally in working with this population is that you learn who their dates are. I can no longer feel safe making blanket referrals to service agencies, as I have had the experience of having the kid come back to tell me that it was a date sitting behind the desk. I now have to identify specific people within the agency and refer to them. I have gone to court with a kid who was sentenced on a prostitution charge by a judge who was a date. I know a kid who got in a car to pull a date, only to find herself sitting next to her father. After the initial surprise and discomfort, her father went through with the date. The amount of hypocrisy that these kids confront is staggering, and we still wonder why they don't trust us?

Please bear in mind that these descriptions are from the kids' perspective of our society and culture. As you are trying to establish a relationship, kids will try to categorize you into one of the above groups. Give the kid some time to learn to trust you. They are often very confused about the roles and motivations of adults they meet on the street.

Summary

Successful intervention with street youth is in part dependent on understanding the cultural context of their behaviors and motivations. It is important to avoid mistakes made by interpreting their behaviors *out of context*. Since it is difficult to absorb and adapt all of this material, I suggest the following four points to remember:

- "On the streets" refers to a conceptual perception of the world.
- Street youth and adolescent prostitutes are members of a sub-culture that exists within conventional adult society, and street concepts are formed in relation and in reaction to the treatment and attitudes of the parent culture.
- Behaviors can be understood and predicted by understanding youths' conceptual framework.
- Transitioning youth from the streets goes beyond the provision of food, clothing, and shelter. It is a long-term process that includes changing their concept of the world and their self-image.

MODULE ONE

Focus Question 2

Outcome

FOCUS QUESTION 2: What is street culture and how does it affect how I would work with youth?

Outcome: A list of five important concepts about street culture and ideas of how you would use each as you start working with youth on their basic skills.

Instructions: List below five concepts that you have learned from this overview of street culture. For each concept, try to state one or more ways in which you would apply this knowledge to your interaction with street youth in the context of your training sessions.

1. Concept:

   How I would use it:

2. Concept:

   How I would use it:

3. Concept:

How I would use it:

4. Concept:

How I would use it?

5. Concept:

How I would use it?

MODULE ONE

Focus Question 3

FOCUS QUESTION 3: How are street youth like and not like other adolescents?

Objective: To become familiar with the ways in which street youth have experienced abnormal adolescent development and how these experiences and their life stage affect work with them.

Critical Points

- Services, including the volunteer services of trainers and tutors, may make street existence more livable, without helping youth to become capable of leaving the streets.
- Street youth are adolescents who should be going through some of the later stages in realizing themselves, valuing themselves as individuals, and learning how to interact with others.
- Histories of abuse and neglect have led to arrested social and psychological development in many street youth.
- Services that involve youth as partners in learning will help them to mature and become capable of change.

A Developmental Approach for Street Youth Programs[1]

Services Must Help Youth to Develop Toward Adulthood

Services may help youth live on the streets. Street youth programs are providing an important service by improving the general quality of life for youth, offering protection, meeting survival needs, and providing a social network for support. At this time, however, most services are only able to provide "short term and transitional" assistance. The outcome of assistance to youth is shaped by two factors: 1) the limits of material resources, and 2) the depth of their need and the socialization experiences they bring to services.

You cannot really leave street life unless you have another structure into which you can move. This fact is not lost on street youth. They utilize transition housing when they are eligible, for example, but they know full well that the only long-term living situation available to them may be the street. Youth often perceive services more as part of an adaptive pattern to street existence than as an opportunity for real change.

It is not uncommon--and is in fact most often the case--that youth who have all the prerequisites for a stable exit, including housing, income, reconciliation with family, a structured daily activity, and an off-street support network, fail to leave street life. This observation does not imply any mal-intent on the part of youth. We have all observed their numerous and genuine attempts to change.

A developmental view can help youth leave the streets. What has not been reflected in the design and delivery of services is a systematic understanding of the effects of abuse and neglect on psycho-social, psycho-sexual development and cognitive organization and how these disruptions disable youth in their efforts to leave the streets. We are beginning to understand that increased resources are not the only answer to helping street youth. Effective programs must also be based on a solid understanding of the developmental process of youth.

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[1] This entire essay is excerpted and adapted from Debra Boyer, A developmental approach for street youth programs. In D. Boyer (Ed.), *In and out of street life: Readings on working with street youth*. Draft Version. Portland, OR: Project LUCK, 1987. Support for that publication was provided by the National Center for Neighborhood Enterprise through a grant from the Federal Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. Used by permission.

Street Youth Lacked Opportunity for Normal Development

Stages of normal development. Why can't street youth function outside of a street environment? The answer begins to emerge when we look at the effects of abuse and neglect on normal development.

It is beyond the scope of this article to describe the processes of child development in detail. What I have chosen to do in order to stimulate the training process, is to describe seven major developmental tasks that are accomplished from infancy through adolescence.

- **Basic sensory communication**: Communication skills begin in infancy at the basic level of sensory input. The infant becomes increasingly sensor-perceptive and sensitive to external stimulation.
- **Meeting needs**: The child learns to get needs met through a relationship with the mother and getting adults to respond through crying.
- **Separation and individualization**: The child develops self-knowledge and trust through establishing a sense of separateness and a stable and distinct identity. There is a growing understanding by the child that she/he is physically distinct from others and has a permanence that is achieved foremost by the meeting of psychological and bio/nutritional needs.
- **Social interaction skills**: Play and interaction with peers is foundation for interaction skills, and social and intellectual knowledge. There is pleasure in creative and spontaneous play with no goals and freedom to fantasize. It is a time to express and explore unacceptable thoughts and feelings and to further develop a separate and stable self-concept.
- **Intellectual development**: Play and, in particular, role taking, is where children learn the shared meanings of a group. This information is the framework for morality and empathy which is necessary for decision-making and problem-solving abilities, as an individual and as part of a group.
- **Transmission of culture**: The child learns values, beliefs, and behavior from relationships with adults which form the basis for social integration.
- **Autonomy**: During adolescence there are strategic interactions that enhance self-esteem, attempts to establish autonomy, individualization, and clearer understanding of the self. The focus is on peers, the social nature of the self, and a belief in self-volition.

Effects of abuse on development. Now let us look at what happens to the developmental processes of youth who have been victimized by abuse and neglect, who have not received the opportunity to learn skills for socialization and integration.

- **Muted sensory response**: Victims of abuse have experienced negative sensory messages: their world stinks, they hear and see violence, they have felt pain and it has hurt. They learn to shut down. Infants whose mothers do not establish eye contact or touch them enough will experience a similar response. There is an inability to communicate at the most basic human level of sensory communication.

- **Needs are not met**: Victims of abuse have not had their needs met--no one responds to crying or responds with punishment, or needs are not met in a predictable way. Children fail to gain a sense of having an ability to create cause and effect in their world. Events around them are experienced as random occurrences.

- **Responsibility for the actions of others**: Victims often internalize responsibility for parental errors because they have not learned to distinguish themselves as separate and distinct from others. They have difficulty developing a positive psychological and physical self-image. This particular developmental deficit is manifest in youth who are involved in prostitution who have a "fluid" self-concept; they do not know where they end and someone else begins.

- **Decision-making and problem-solving**: Victims have had no opportunities for practicing these skills in adult or peer relations. They feel powerless and ineffectual. Often there have been irrational consequences such as beating, for actions.

- **Trust**: Victims cannot trust because there has been no foundation to learn trust, or they have learned *not* to trust. This effect is often seen in services with youth who will not ask for help or information. They become very isolated.

- **Actions and behavior**: Victims cannot distinguish between feeling and doing. They have not had opportunities for play, creativity, and spontaneity, and thus have not learned they have control over actions. They are often afraid to feel.

In summary, victims of abuse are at high risk for cognitive and motor dysfunction, language disability, hearing and speech deficits as well as defects in personal and social skills. One can see that to simply increase the number of services, such as jobs, may not achieve the desired goal if developmental problems are not addressed.

A Developmental Competency Approach

Services have tried to find the key to creating change in youth. The right remedy has been sought through various combinations of services. Yet, we have all seen youth who use services and continue to recycle back into street life. Based on my most recent research on exiting from street life, I have concluded that programming for street youth needs to be restructured in a way that will promote normal growth and development in these youth. There also needs to be recognition of the ways in which the passive application of services can undermine program goals of self-sufficiency for youth by not addressing their developmental needs.

The pattern of service delivery has been to administer aid for the symptoms of a destructive lifestyle. Short-term housing, for example, is offered with the expectation that youth will find something stable on their own. Talk therapy is often relied on as a panacea for change. Unfortunately, the majority of street youth have long-term problems needing long-term solutions, solutions that should complement normal developmental processes rather than by-passing them. In other words, the patient must be involved in the healing process.

Involve the youth in seeking solutions. I have observed that clients are most positive toward services when they feel they are of some value to the staff and to the programs. Youth involvement needs to be a part of the service philosophy. Youth I have interviewed stated they often felt ill at ease with services because they felt useless and did not like having to accept charity. In addition, one hears staff frustrations repeated in statements that they "rescue" youth too much.

Given the way street youth who are victims of abuse relate to the world, there is little difference in meaning between being beaten up on the street one night and fed by an outreach worker the next. They are both random and uncontrollable events in an unpredictable environment. It is critical that the style of service delivery addresses the view of the world held by victims and enables them to alter their view to one that gives them control over their lives. The alternative may be that we are playing an unwitting role in perpetuating street lifestyles among youth.

Offer opportunities to practice skills for adulthood. The philosophy of service provision needs to incorporate the idea of "getting youth ready" to leave street life by stimulating their normal growth and developmental processes. This requires a service environment that does not passively offer services, but is structured with opportunities that stimulate development and self-esteem by giving youth value through opportunities to learn and practice skills in a participatory and experiential process. The ultimate objective of services would be to achieve developmental competency through learning skills which are the basis for positive integration into adult society.

Self-confidence and skills learning are not separable. From a philosophical perspective, the intention of program services would be to turn youth into givers. Based on my most recent research, I have recommended that programs integrate developmental approaches that emphasize building self-confidence and acquiring skills through contribution. Self-help models have demonstrated effectiveness in a variety of settings.

Work with youth as partners. For street youth, such a model would include work, recreation, and peer group interactions that accomplish the following:

- Actively involve youth in the provision of their own needs.
- Actively involve youth in decision-making aspects of program operations.
- Actively involve youth in the provision of services to other youth.

The components of this approach are based on learning skills and self-worth through doing, learning, and teaching. It is difficult to talk someone into developing. With an active style of service delivery, growth and development are stimulated through experience and participation in a positive context.

Overcome abuse by stimulating developmental processes in the youth. It is the nature of the child to complete developmental tasks, mature, and become competent. The need to be competent is basic and intrinsic; we do not have to motivate youth to grow. Competency comes from experiential learning with persons, objects, activities, and social interactions. It does not require high tech knowledge, training, or equipment. It does require a shift in focus from psychopathology and curing, to promoting health.

Research has shown that youth who have been damaged by abuse and neglect can become adequately adjusted adults. Stimulating developmental processes can overcome the effects of abuse and addiction. We have not yet trusted the innate competency of human development as part of the healing process. We now know enough about the nature of the child and the abused street child to use these tools (Durkin and Durkin 1975; Durkin 1986).

References

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MODULE ONE

Focus Question 3

Outcome

FOCUS QUESTION 3: How are street youth like and not like other adolescents?

Outcome: A list of three concepts about street youth as adolescents and ideas on how you would apply the concepts of basic skills training.

Instructions: List below three concepts that you have learned from this overview of developmental processes in street youth. For each concept, try to state one or more ways in which you would apply this knowledge to your interaction with street youth in the context of your training sessions.

1. Concept:

   How I would use it:

2. Concept:

How I would use it:

3. Concept:

How I would use it:

MODULE ONE

Focus Question 4

FOCUS QUESTION 4: What can I expect in working with street youth?

Objective: A personal assessment of your ability and motivation to work with this youth population.

Critical Points

- Most street youth have a history of abuse and will manifest some of the street culture attitudes and developmental problems that have been described in the focus questions above.
- Street youth will present challenges to your assumptions about how our society treats its young and will challenge you to prove yourself the exception.
- Tutors and trainers need to be supporting and accepting, but at the same time not treat youth as helpless--and therefore unchangeable--victims.
- Tutors and trainers must be clear about their personal expectations for this volunteer work and must always place the needs of the youth first.

Thinking About Working With Street Youth

Establishing a Relationship with Street Youth[1]

Youthful survivors. As the three focus questions above have reported, street youth come from all parts of our society and they have fled their families or institutions of the courts toward some alternative that--at least before the fact--seemed preferable to remaining in their homes. They are not easy, "normal" kids. But those whom you will meet in youth serving agencies have done well enough for themselves to survive, alone, in a hostile and violent environment.

Histories of abuse. Besides their youth and their homelessness, the greatest common background factor among these young people is their histories of abuse. In Portland, social service workers estimate that:

- 75% of street youth have been sexually abused.
- 85% have been physically abused.
- 86% are children of an alcoholic.
- 73% experienced loss of a parent through death or divorce before they were age five.

Developmentally, these youth have been un-nurtured or mal-nurtured. They need to learn how to enter into trustful relationships. They are not mentally ill or abnormal. They need to learn--it will be their first opportunity--what caring, reciprocal relationships can be like.

Aspects of a positive relationship. Here are several suggestions for beginning to create positive relationships so important to street youth:

- Set aside your own values system, in order to avoid being judgmental in your approach. Youth are very sensitive to how you see them.
- Look for a place in yourself that enables you to identify with them and build on that.

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[1] This section is adapted from "Introduction to Street Youth," a volunteer training workshop by Barb Sussex, Coordinator, Street Youth Program, Outside In. The workshop was sponsored by Project LUCK in Portland, Oregon, September 1, 1987.

- o Relate to them as kids, but kids who need to be actors and initiators in remaking their own lives.
- o Think of street youth as people who have adapted to the abnormal situation that they grew up in. Their behavior is normal, if you think of it as a symptom of their lives.
- o Be re-nurturing, using yourself as a model for a good relationship.
- o Be consistent and reliable, in minor as well as important matters. This is the best way to model new ways of thinking and acting.
- o Use your work with the youth to empower them, giving them the opportunity to co-work with you. How you work with them is more important than any single thing you say or teach.
- o Consider your work as offering tools, both skills and attitudes, that will help youth to determine their own futures and make decisions that are best for them.

Potential pitfalls in establishing a relationship with street youth.[2] In their efforts to establish positive relationships with street youth, adults new to this type of work (whether as agency workers or as volunteers) should beware of some common pitfalls:

1. **Beware of your need to be accepted by the youth.**

   The need to be accepted by the kids can be destructive if it overrides the needs of individual youth or the integrity of the program. It can cause an adult to become so involved with particular youth that other program needs or youth are overlooked and may even be jeopardized.

   a. **Don't assume that "If I am easier on the kids they will like me more."**

      Most youth need external controls and may even ask for them. They often view adults who won't provide controls as afraid, weak, or easy to manipulate.

      If you don't establish your personal boundaries, as well as your authority to set limits, kids may need to continually test you to determine what's okay and not okay on any particular day. Our boundaries give structure and traction for relationship development.

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[2] This section is excerpted and adapted from "Establishing Relationships," volunteer training materials from the Greenhouse, Portland, Oregon, 1987.

b. **Don't try to become one of the boys (or girls).**

If you only identify yourself as a peer to the youth, you will have a difficult time handling situations requiring you to assume a role of authority.

Many of the kids really need to learn how to relate to adults--to learn that some adults can be trustworthy and that authority figures can be supportive and loving.

c. **Don't fall into criticizing other adults the youth know to increase your likeability.**

If you do, you may alienate yourself with other adults or authority figures; this is especially serious if the other adults are other volunteers, agency staff or the youth's parents. It may well be important to affirm yourself (that is, the limits of your own behavior, as in "I will not abuse you"), but it is unwise to affirm yourself by putting down others (for example, "Yeah, the police are really bad...").

2. **Beware of taking on the role of the youth's "new parent."**

It is completely unrealistic to assume that we can somehow give any youth the love he/she may not have received from his/her natural parents.

To hold out this promise is often destructive, in that we are unable to commit everything we have to any individual youth and we may set them up to experience another failure and just reaffirm any negative beliefs they may have now about their "unloveableness" or unworthiness. For many kids, the promise of true love brings up so many fears or fantasies about what our relationship should be, that it will effectively block any positive relationship development.

3. **Beware of your need to adhere to your personal philosophy or values.**

A youth's behavior may conflict with your personal philosophy or values and limit your ability to respond to the youth in a productive manner. If your orientation is too narrow or rigid, it can prevent you from being objective and flexible in your interactions with kids or other adults. It's easy to develop philosophies in order to justify our actions, rather than truly considering the needs of others and the program of services as a whole.

4. **Beware of your need to control.**

There is subtle distinction between trying to control others and placing the responsibility for control on them. You can do the latter by providing a supportive structure, limits and realistic consequences for their actions.

Attempts at direct control of street youth frequently fail; helping them be in control or supporting a positive direction they've taken often succeeds.

5. **Beware of your need for success with a youth.**

   If your need for success is too strong, it will limit your ability to become involved in the long-term interaction so necessary for working with many street youth.

   An adult who views a youth's lack of improvement as a personal threat may turn his/her attention away from that youth (rejection) and inadvertently add to the youth's obstacles toward progress. This may reinforce the youth's thinking that he/she was right in warding off the adult rather than trusting him/her.

   A youth pushed too strongly by our attention may be overwhelmed and may become further entrenched in adult-avoidance or success-avoidance defenses. Many youth will feel an adult's expectations for their success or failure, and rather than risk not living up to these expectations, the youth will avoid or even sabotage the potential relationship.

An Example of Issues Faced in Working With Street Youth[3]

Working with street youth is challenging, especially emotionally. In presenting this training over the years, audiences have challenged me with some excellent questions. Here is an important one:

> When I think of all the abuses these kids have suffered, both in their homes and on the street, a great deal of anger wells up inside me. How does one personally deal with that, and does that disqualify you from working with this population?

Your anger is real and justified. This is an excellent question for several reasons. First, it faces an often overlooked reality. If you are going to be working closely with street youth and adolescent prostitutes you will be privilege to client experiences that will be so inconceivable as to challenge your own conception of the world. You will be dealing with children who have been beaten, raped, prostituted, sexually and physically abused, and otherwise hurt in some of the most vicious and hideous ways. You will gain knowledge of the depth of the abuse in our society, as you begin to learn that the perpetrators in these stories are Mr. and Mrs. America, your neighbors, friends, and community leaders. You see an innocent hurt child sitting in front of you, dressed like a prostitute, bruised, and emaciated from drugs, and it makes you mad. Real live anger.

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[3] This section is excerpted and abridged from Jerry Fest, Street culture. In D. Boyer (Ed.), *In and out of street life: Readings on working with street youth*. Draft Version. Portland, OR: Project LUCK, 1987. Support for that publication was provided by the National Center for Neighborhood Enterprise through a grant from the Federal Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. Used by permission.

I don't have any magic wands to deal with this anger, and yes, it can disqualify you from working with them. Your anger is not going to do the kids any good, and may in fact harm them. These kids are great for taking the blame.

Don't let youth become vehicles for your emotions. A mentor of mine, Linda Zingarro, who works with street youth in Vancouver, B.C., tells the people who come to work for her that this is the easiest population in the world to work with. The reason is that if you screw up, the kid will take the blame.

If you sleep with the kid the kid will think, "Well, I seduced him." If you make an appointment and don't keep it, the kid will think, "Well, I'm just not worth it." So if you allow yourself to get angry over the kid's life, the kid will take that personally, and feel bad that he/she exposed you to him/her and made your life miserable. Anger will prevent you from being effective.

The work is hard, but worth it. You will sometimes take your emotions home with you. Expect some sleepless nights. Expect to feel powerless and helpless when it comes to that one kid who really got to you.

Working with these kids is worthwhile and rewarding, and your life will be enriched by getting to know them. But their lives are not pleasant, and you will experience that and have to deal with it as you work with them.

Youth are angry, too. Another thing you must be prepared for is their anger. If you are successful at breaking through their barriers and getting them to the point where they are able to feel something again, the first thing that they're usually going to feel is anger, often extreme rage.

Remember how angry their lives make you; imagine how angry their lives make them. These expressions of anger, whether small releases on a daily basis, or large bursts when dealing with issues, have to be okay. You are all the time sending the message that they have to feel something; well, when they do it's going to be rage. I prepare for this by not taking small angry outbursts personally.

I feel that providing a safe atmosphere for them to discharge anger is one of the most valuable services we have to offer. When working in an individual counseling setting I prepare by expecting anger. To minimize damage I keep a tower of interlocking popsicle sticks in my office. This is a great target for anger, with its ability to be smashed into a million pieces, harming nothing, and being easily reassembled afterwards.

The Youth-Tutor Relationship[4]

The ideal tutor, agency staff agree, is a person who can tread the narrow, wavering line between friend and teacher. As one counselor put it, "Kids don't care how much you know till they know how much you care."

Several staff have suggested the big sister/brother model for the tutor-youth relationship--a model widely used in youth-serving agencies. In such a framework the tutor commits to a substantial length of time with one youth and enough time each week to develop a close, support-based relationship. The tutor can then provide training that is tailored to the interests and needs of this one youth and function as friend, advocate, and intermediary with the "establishment" world, for example, setting up and accompanying the youth to job interviews.

Tutoring means counseling. Regardless of the formal structure adopted, youth workers advise that:

> A literacy tutor with these kids has to always be a counselor to an extent--or maybe primarily--as well. They can't be done separately. A kid can't learn from someone they can't trust, grow with...
>
> [A tutor should be] supportive and accepting of whatever the kid has to put out. Instead of challenging what they say or think. They [kids] need a sense of security. They come from crazy families, where they don't know if there's any security. A tutor can be an incredible mentor just by being supportive.
>
> [It's] important to be authoritative, give them guidelines, structure--kids need that. They want to feel safe. But you need to check back with the kid to see how they feel about how things are going, help them work with it, validate the feelings [they have] and then move on with the issue.

What makes a successful tutor. The following list suggests attributes that would make a good youth tutor:

- **A good listener.** Able to be "real" to the youth, express genuine concern for them as persons, not restrict interest to the basic skills question alone. But don't take the youths' pain on to yourself, for they must take care of themselves: "You can't take the pain away, but you can have compassion."

- **Ability to avoid the parental role.** The relationship should include caring, but not be over-nurturing. These are independent-living persons, regardless of their age.

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[4] This section is excerpted and adapted from Nancy Faires Conklin & Janise Hurtig, *Making the connection: A report for literacy volunteers working with out-of-school youth*, pp. 80-82. Portland, OR: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 1986.

- **Consistency and clarity.** Many youth have come from homes in which authority was arbitrary. They need to know what the rules are, why they exist, and that they are going to be held to them once they agree.

- **Patience.**

- **Respect for "native intelligence," not just grades and test scores.** Validation of the youth's previous experiences with education and understanding of the effect that severe emotional distress can have on demonstrations of ability.

- **Respect for the youth's privacy.** Suspend your curiosity about their lives outside the tutoring situation. Confidence requires trust and youth will shy away quickly if they sense they are being probed or examined. Any request for specific information about their background, interests, or aspirations should be directly and clearly tied to some agreed-upon tutoring goal.

- **Confrontation skills.** Exercised with caution, the ability to challenge a youth who comes in and is, as a counselor put it, "just messing around." Youth need to learn to take themselves seriously; they will if you do. They will test limits, try to see how you act as an authority, in order to feel safe in the situation--this is a street-wise way to judge how they can act. Oft quoted by staff: "Respect them, but expect respect."

- **Flexibility and creativity in approaching teaching.** Listening to what the learner wants or will respond to, even when it is not well articulated. The kind of creativity that will tie the teaching to everyday situations, drawing analogies to the youths' own lives. Programs should be developed cooperatively with the learner and altered if they are not meeting the youth's needs.

- **Ability to convey concepts in simple terms.**

- **A strong sense of humor.** Ability to enjoy the positive side of life, of youths' stories.

- **Non-judgmental attitude.** Youth will search immediately for condemnation of themselves or their lives in the adults they meet. And, if they detect it, it only serves to validate their low self-esteem. You are here to support and train, not to rescue.

- **Good assessment skills.** Ability to give positive, supportive feedback often.

- **Some insight into street life**, so that you understand the range of backgrounds you will meet and so that the youth can't shock you with their stories. If the tutor is a street-wise person, he/she should be far enough from the street life to have some distance on it, a mature attitude about the difficulties of the transition.

- **Clear understanding of what you, the tutor, are seeking in this activity.** Examination of your own needs that participation in a program with youth fulfills and how you can keep your own interests separate from those of the learner.

It is critical that tutors understand the depths of the problems faced by their youthful learners, but at the same time are able to recognize them as individuals and accept, respect, and learn from them. One counselor summed up many staff members' feelings in this way:

> Don't treat kids as victims. This doesn't help them move out of the role or empower them. You have to treat them as normal, okay kids. That helps them work through their victimization.

In the insightful *Handbook for the Volunteer Tutor*, Rauch (1985:4) points out "three Rs" for remedial reading tutors: relationship, release, and re-education.

> One must remember that 'average' remedial readers are frustrated individuals. In all probability, they have been frustrated for years in attempts to improve their reading. Students need to feel that this is a new chance or fresh start and that no one is being prejudged. So the most important step is the **relationship** of mutual respect between tutor and student. **Release** means that the student is relaxed and secure enough to devote the necessary mental, emotional, and physical energies to the task at hand, i.e., learning to read. **Re-education** stands for the teaching process which can be successful only if the previous 2 Rs have been established.

These observations could not be more true of working with street youth. With street youth, however, it is not just in academic skills areas, but in many domains of life that they have the need to create or recreate new, positive, and trustful learning experiences.

Being Clear About Your Reasons for Working with Street Youth

In looking for volunteers to work with street youth, agency staff are careful to explore potential volunteers' reasons for wanting to do this type of volunteer work. As a volunteer you must be very clear about your expectations for yourself, as well as for the youth. For example, it is natural and even laudable that you might want to help street youth if you were one once yourself, or if you have experienced any of the traumas so prevalent in the lives of these young people. However, you must examine your motives and make sure that you are not using this opportunity to work through some of the unresolved issues in your past.

Most people who volunteer expect something positive for themselves out of the experience--to get some satisfaction from helping someone else is normal and perfectly acceptable. However, your primary motivation must be the well-being of the youth with whom you are working. As you tutor, there may be times when you become aware of your own personal reactions. You must be continuously asking yourself:

> "What is best for the youth in this particular situation?"

Sort out your own needs. If you find personal issues surfacing (and this is bound to happen from time to time, often to the surprise of the volunteer him/herself), you must be able to step back and objectively determine when it would be better for someone else to handle the particular issue or situation. Knowing your own limitations, both in terms of your training and your personal, emotional issues and needs, will be a key to being a good tutor. The ability and willingness to defer and/or refer to agency staff members when appropriate is a necessary and valued quality in a volunteer.

References

Rauch, Sidney J. (1985). "What the volunteer tutor should know about reading instruction. (pp. 1-9) In Sidney J. Rauch & Joseph Sanacore, (Eds.), *Handbook for the volunteer tutor*, (2nd ed.). Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

MODULE ONE

Focus Question 4

Outcome

FOCUS QUESTION 4: What can I expect in working with street youth?

Outcome: **A self-assessment that will become a part of your application to work with the Takin' It to the Streets project.**

Volunteer Tutor Self-Assessment

Takin' It to the Streets

Name: ______________ ______________ ______________
First Middle Last

Interests and Experience

1. Why do you want to tutor street youth? ______________________

2. Which of your personal qualities or skills will be of greatest benefit for this program? (Please list at least two.)

3. Please list three things you expect to gain from participating in this program.

4. In this project, you will be involved with youth who have dropped out of school, have been living on the streets, and possibly have been involved in drug abuse, prostitution or other types of crime. You will be presented with a wide variety of circumstances and values. To help us in your placement with the project, please indicate your feelings about working with each of the categories below. Use the following code:

1. I would be comfortable.
2. I would be comfortable, but with some difficulty.
3. I would be uncomfortable.
4. I would not like to work with this category.
5. I'm not sure how I would feel.

Socioeconomic status:
____Upper
____Middle
____Lower

Sex:
____Male
____Female

Age:
____Under 16 years old
____Over 16 years old

Ethnicity:
____Anglo
____Black
____Hispanic
____Native American
____Asian
____Other

Sexual Preference:
____Heterosexual
____Homosexual
____Bisexual
____Unclear

Other:
____History of physical/sexual/mental abuse
____Drug/alcohol problems
____Criminal background:
    ____Theft/burglary
    ____Drug-related
    ____Physical violence

5. In a brief paragraph, please explain why you feel that basic skills training is important for these youth.

____
____
____
____

6. Please describe any experience you have had:

(Attach an extra page if you need more space.)

a. Working with street youth:

____
____
____

b. Teaching/tutoring youth (and/or adults):

____
____
____

c. Teaching/tutoring literacy or basic skills:

____
____
____

d. Other volunteer experience:

____
____
____

e. Other training that may be useful to you as you tutor:

____

____

____

MODULE TWO

LITERACY SKILLS OF SCHOOL NON-COMPLETERS AND LITERACY PRACTICES OF STREET YOUTH

In order to work successfully with street youth, it is important that you are familiar with the range of literacy skill levels you might encounter, the literacy skills youth would need to function successfully as adults, the ways in which street youth use oral and written language, and their attitudes about literacy.

FOCUS QUESTION 1: What levels of literacy skills might be expected in youth who do not complete school?

Outcome: A list of three most important facts learned about skills of youth out-of-school.

FOCUS QUESTION 2: What literacy skills are required to prepare youth for urban life?

Outcome: A list of literacy skills you think you would need if you were living on the streets.

FOCUS QUESTION 3: What functions does literacy play in the lives of street youth?

Outcome: A selection of three literacy activities common among street youth that you think you could incorporate into basic skills training.

FOCUS QUESTION 4: What attitudes do street youth have toward literacy?

Outcome: A list of suggestions for approaching youth with the need to develop skills, while supporting the youths' need to appear competent.

MODULE TWO

Focus Question 1

FOCUS QUESTION 1: What levels of literacy skills might be expected in youth who do not complete school?

Objective: To become acquainted with the range of literacy and general verbal skills levels that might be expected in learners.

Critical Points

- There are no reliable studies of street youth, so we must use information on the skill levels of the general population of school dropouts with caution.
- Practically all youth have some reading skills, regardless of when they left school.
- Youth who have learning disabilities often leave school, so some street youth may be expected to have a learning disability.
- We cannot estimate reading skill level from the grade in school the youth completed.
- Many youth did not learn to use literacy as a tool, even though they stayed in school many years.
- On the other hand, many youth may have higher reading abilities than their test scores would indicate.
- Youth may have much higher general verbal and intellectual ability than their reading and writing skills or their lack of success in school would indicate.

Terms to Know

Non-reader: A person who cannot read or write at all, cannot decode the letters that make up words. Almost no out-of-school youth are non-readers.

Functional literacy: Reading and writing skills as defined in terms of the actual functions, or uses, of literacy in the person's daily life. Level of skill needed for functional literacy varies according to where the person lives, what work he/she seeks, etc. Youth need a different level of functional literacy when they want to get off the streets and get jobs.

Functionally illiterate: A person is functionally illiterate if he/she cannot read texts and forms that he/she comes across in daily life--that is, if a person's skills do not match her/his skill needs. A youth may be functionally literate for street life, but functionally illiterate for life on the job.

Learning disability: A very specific, physiologically based problem that prevents or makes difficult the acquisition of the skills of reading or writing. Street youth may have failed in school because of learning disabilities, although their general intelligence is normal.

Literacy Skills of Youth Who Do Not Complete School[1]

This Information Is about Dropouts in General

Street youth, as a specific group, have not received a great deal of attention from educators until recently. The information in this section summarizes what is known about the literacy skills of youth who have not completed school. We do not know how typical street youth are of this much larger group.

Very few are non-readers. There are only a small minority of American youth who are without any measurable reading and writing skills. A 1979 U.S. Census Bureau survey found only 0.2% of 14- to 24-year olds who said they could not read when the margin of literacy was placed at the sixth grade level (U.S. Department of Commerce 1984:146). Although this study did not reach youth living outside established households, these very small numbers for non-readers are reflected in other research as well.

Learning disabilities cause drop-out. Most categorically non-reading youth, like many adults who have attended school but cannot read at all, suffer from a learning disability, in most cases undiagnosed (Gold and Johnson 1981). Estimates of the learning disabled range from 10% to 15% of the population, only 2% of whom are properly diagnosed by the schools (Dearman and Plisko 1984, Chall 1983). Most of these youth will experience academic difficulty and will drop out of school. Learning disabilities that lead to reading failure may stem from broad cognitive deficiencies, but more often undiagnosed learning disabilities are narrow, specific physiological problems that effectively prohibit decoding the written signal.

For example, some children have visual motor impairment that makes the reading of sequenced letters a confusing process, retarding their reading, but not affecting their oral communication. In others left-right orientation problems lead to confusion of letters such as "b" and "d".

Regardless of the extent of the verbal learning problem, the effect, if undiagnosed, is usually the same: The child does not learn, falls behind, and drops out of school. One of the dropouts with whom we conducted formal interviews mentioned a difficulty with "mixed-up spelling", a probable learning disability.

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[1] This entire essay is excerpted and adapted from Nancy Faires Conklin & Janise Hurtig, *Making the connection: A report for literacy volunteers working with out-of-school youth*, pp. 45-48. Portland, OR: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 1986.

Assessments of Reading Grade Level

Estimates of dropouts' literacy levels suggest that, while there are few who cannot read, many have marginal literacy skills. Many dropouts' reading and writing skill levels may be inadequate for securing employment; poor literacy skills are, for many youth, barriers to participation in most job training programs.

Assessments are derived from testing. Assessments of the reading abilities of out-of-school youth have often been derived from school testing records and the academic histories of school leavers. To predict out-of-school youths' skill levels from school achievement records is to risk inaccuracy. But, generally, early school leavers, as a group, are in the lower ranks of school achievers. Since poor reading ability is widespread, even among high school completers, out-of-school youth must be presumed to have serious literacy skill inadequacies.

Testing of high school seniors nationally reveals that many graduates, perhaps 50%, will not read at the twelfth grade level when they receive their diplomas (Park 1984). In districts with high dropout rates the figures are even higher. For example, a study in the Chicago city schools found 67% of graduates with below-grade-level reading achievement. When the dropout rate is taken into account, only 15% of Chicago youth enter adulthood with twelfth grade reading levels, the skill level which most observers now recommend as the minimum for the contemporary workplace ("Dropouts: Shocking Enough to Get Our Attention?" 1985).

Significant numbers of in-school youth read at levels far lower than accepted minimal standards. Estimates of the proportion of youth who are functionally illiterate vary, but reports using eighth grade reading ability as a minimum level for functional competency set the proportion of functionally illiterate youth at 10% to 13% (National Commission on Excellence in Education 1983, Park 1984).

These same reports estimate that 20% to 30% of early school leavers would be categorized as functional illiterates using the criterion of eighth grade ability. Further, there is widespread sentiment in the educational community that the minimum competency level for success in today's labor force must be raised from eighth to twelfth grade level. This measure would place many more youth and, especially, out-of-school youth in the category of the unemployable.

Leavers experience early disengagement from literacy. Many reading problems contributing to high school dropout emerge during the latter grade school years, when curricula shift from instruction primarily though oral communication to dependence on written materials. In the primary grades, reading and writing are explicitly taught, not used as sources for essential information.

But, in about fourth grade, instruction shifts to reliance upon written material, not just for presenting things that children already know or are simultaneously taught through speech, but for information that is available only through the literacy channel. It is here, when comprehension through reading becomes essential, that disengagement from literacy and the school culture begins to emerge (Chall 1983).

For example, until the fourth grade, there are no discernible differences, for example, between middle and lower class children's reading achievement. But, as the instructional shift away from learning through listening to learning through reading begins to take place, socioeconomic stratification of reading ability also emerges (Chall 1983). This same social stratification will ultimately be replicated in the numbers of students who leave school without completion.

Reading test scores are inaccurate. Generally low reading grade level reports mask variation within the population of early school leavers and, for many youth, fail to accurately reflect their literacy achievement. Thus the out-of-school youth population does not represent uniform literacy training needs for uniform potential to achieve higher literacy skill levels.

For many youth is it not lack of ability, but lack of interest and personal investment in the goals of the school that leads to dropout, both for students whose records indicate academic failure and those who exhibited academic success. Such disengaged students do not perform up to their potential on standardized tests, for a number of reasons: They do not apply themselves to a task whose outcome they regard as of little consequence to their lives; they are distracted by non-school concerns such as family problems; they lack test-taking skills or the emotional security required to perform well under time pressure. We cannot assume that last-available test scores, often recorded at a point close to a student's decision to leave school, accurately reflect either reading and writing achievement or verbal aptitude.

Individuals may have well developed skills in some literacy skills areas and be lacking in others, depending on the point at which they became disengaged from the learning process. The early school years instill word decoding and analytic skills, so almost all school leavers are able to process written text (Chall 1983). At some later, individually determined point, when higher cognitive skills are required, a student may stop investing time and attention in school work. But this may be long before the act of dropping out of school. Thus two dropouts from the tenth grade may have very different literacy skills and training needs.

Further, since dropout is not predicated solely, nor indeed primarily, on failure in school, out-of-school youth represent the whole range of innate intellectual ability. Studies indicate that less than half the students leaving school early are failing and well over half of school leavers have the ability required to complete their curricula.

General verbal ability may be high. Few studies have attempted to ascertain the actual abilities of students who have dropped out of school. Rather, most just take the last in-school standardized test scores as evidence. However, Fine and Rosenberg (1983) measured verbal ability, rather than reading achievement. They found that actual verbal ability was not congruent with school reading test records.

School leavers tend to have a low IQ *or* low reading ability, but the first cannot be assumed by testing the latter. Out-of-school young men tested lower on verbal ability than the average. On the other hand, women and minorities who had dropped out of school had higher-than-average ability, although this was not necessarily reflected in their school grade averages. A startling proportion, 19%, of the early school leavers tested as gifted.

A second study of verbal ability, rather than reading achievement, also indicates that inability to acquire literacy or intellectual difficulties with literacy acquisition cannot be assumed among out-of-school youth. Richardson and Gerlach (1980), testing black youth for general intellectual ability, found that black dropouts had higher IQs than did black high school graduates, but that black dropouts were far less likely to perceive school as a ladder to social mobility than black school completers.

At the other end of the scale, the out-of-school youth population can be expected to contain a larger-than-average number of learning disabled persons with specific difficulties relating to literacy acquisition. As in the non-disabled youth population, their general intellectual ability will not be reflected in their academic success in school.

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MODULE TWO

Focus Question 1

Outcome

FOCUS QUESTION 1: What levels of literacy skills might be expected in youth who do not complete school?

Outcome: A list of three most important facts learned about skills of youth out-of-school.

Instructions: You have just been introduced to what is known about literacy skill levels among school dropouts. List here three facts that you did not know before and which you think are most valuable for you as you prepare to work with street youth on their basic skills. Make a note on how each fact would affect your tutoring.

1. Fact:

How I will use it:

2. Fact:

How I will use it:

3. Fact:

How I will use it:

MODULE TWO

Focus Question 2

FOCUS QUESTION 2: What literacy skills are required to prepare youth for urban life?

Objective: To become familiar with common literacy skills needed for adult urban life and the functional skills typical of school dropouts.

Critical Points

- There are a variety of literacy skills, mostly document and quantitative, that are necessary just to survive in an urban setting.
- Youth may exhibit literacy skills, but still not possess all the skills necessary for basic adult life.
- Document literacy is essential to urban survival, but is only moderately well developed in youth who left high school after grade eight and not well developed in youth who left high school before grade eight.
- Quantitative literacy is very important to urban survival, but developed only at low levels in youth who have dropped out of school.
- Prose literacy is rarely required for urban survival and may be very poorly developed in school dropouts, even those who left during high school.

Terms to Know

Survival literacy skills: Level of skills in reading, writing, and figuring that is required just to secure basic services and function as an independent adult.

Document literacy: The knowledge and skills required to locate and use information contained in job applications or payroll forms, bus schedules, maps, tables, indexes, and so forth. Both document reading and document writing are important components of survival literacy.

Quantitative literacy: The knowledge and skills required to apply arithmetic operations, either alone or sequentially, that are embedded in printed materials, such as in balancing a checkbook, figuring out a tip, completing an order form, or determining the amount of interest from a loan advertisement. Quantitative reading skills and some quantitative writing skills are critical to survival literacy.

Prose literacy: The knowledge and skills required to understand and use information from texts, for example: editorials, news stories, and poems. Prose reading and writing skills are stressed in school, but are less important than document and quantitative literacy when assessing survival literacy skill requirements.

Functional Literacy for Urban Life:
How Do High School Dropouts Measure Up?

Survival Literacy

Adult urban literacy survival skills. A study of the skills that urban-dwelling adults find most important for their daily survival (Negin and Krugler 1980) is also suggestive for out-of-school youth, both as they try to get by on the streets and as they attempt to find their way out into the "straight" world.

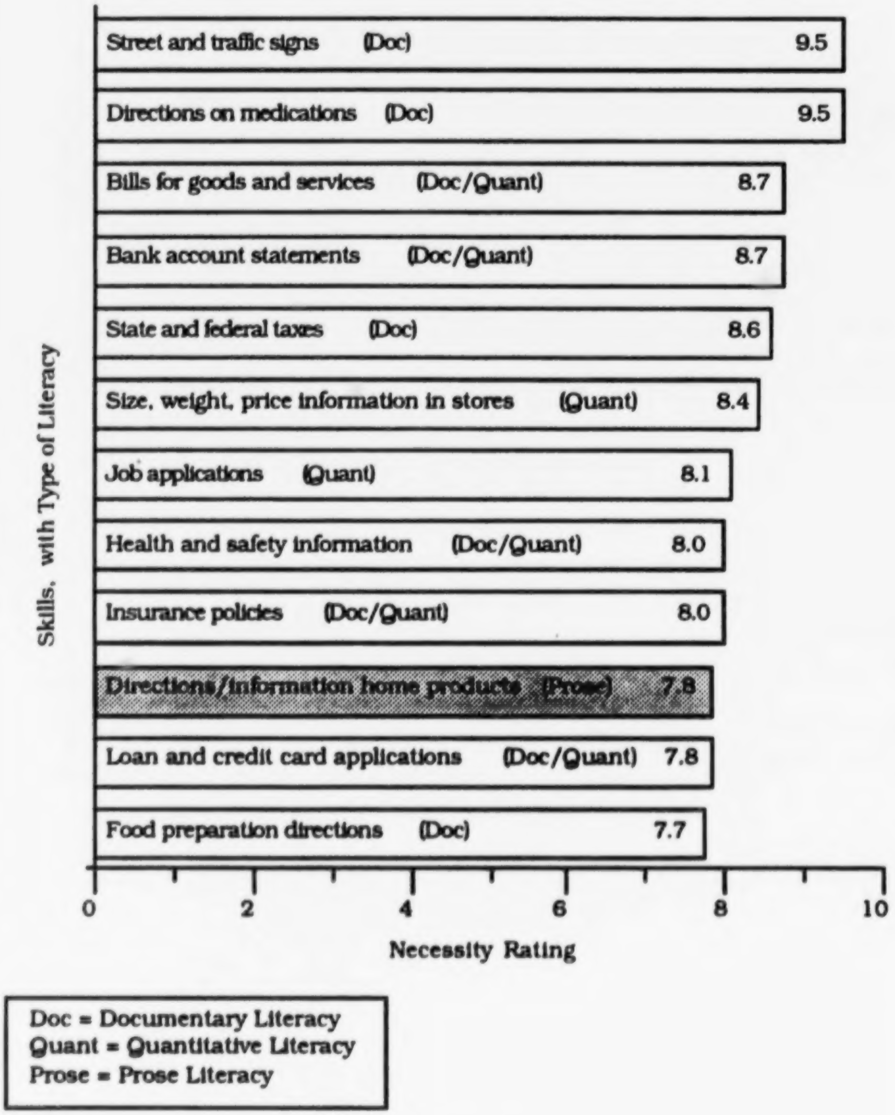
Mail and telephone responses from 250 adult Milwaukee, Wisconsin, residents rated the importance of different functional literacy skills on a ten-point scale. Of 20 common literacy practices offered in the questionnaire, those listed in Figure 2.1 were ranked as most important by the respondents. These adults' responses bear parallels to out-of-school youths' stated training priorities.

Document literacy. Adult urban functional literacy especially requires document literacy skills, i.e., the ability to gain, locate and use information that is embedded in forms or notices and to supply required information on forms. Examples of *document writing* are filling out job applications and entering information on a check or a bill. Examples of *document reading* are locating a movie from a listing, determining eligibility for services on a youth center notice board, and finding the right bus from a schedule. Nine of the twelve urban survival literacy skills cited in Figure 2.1, below, are exclusively document literacy or incorporate document literacy.

Quantitative literacy. In addition, as Figure 2.1 demonstrates, quantitative literacy, the ability to apply basic arithmetic operations, is very important to adult urban survival. Functional literacy activities such as determining correct change, calculating costs and balancing a checkbook require quantitative skills. Seven of the twelve top literacy activities that Milwaukee adults reported required quantitative skills as at least a component of the task.

Figure 2.1

Need for Urban Survival Literacy Skills,
Rated on a 10-Point Scale



Source: Adapted from Negin and Krugler 1980

Prose literacy. Prose literacy, the ability to understand and use textual information, appears as a primary component in only one of the twelve tasks most frequently cited in Figure 2.1. These adults noted that using information from product directions was a critical skill, but did not rate such activities as locating information in news stories, writing a complaint letter, or analyzing a prose or poetry text as essential for urban life.

Out-of-school youth need adult-level skills. Youth who are living basically on their own, whether on the streets or in jobs or training programs, must be able to function essentially as adults. They must be capable of securing the daily necessities of food, shelter, and medical and other help. For youth living the street life, money must be gotten somehow and temporary employment, panhandling, and other activities all require some literacy skills. Just negotiating around a strange city requires considerable knowledge. Use of assistance services requires that street youth find the correct agency locations, determine their eligibility, and, in many cases, fill out forms. For youth who want to leave the streets, additional survival literacy activities become necessary.

Youth Literacy: A National Profile

The following sections offer the results of the first national study of youth literacy that queried young people about their functional literacy skills (Kirsch & Jungeblut 1987). Remember that these figures are for *all* youth, in and out of school. Street youth are not "typical" and their numbers may be under-represented in these data, since their very lifestyles make it difficult to find and include them in such studies. Nevertheless, these figures are suggestive of the range of skills that youth may be expected to display.

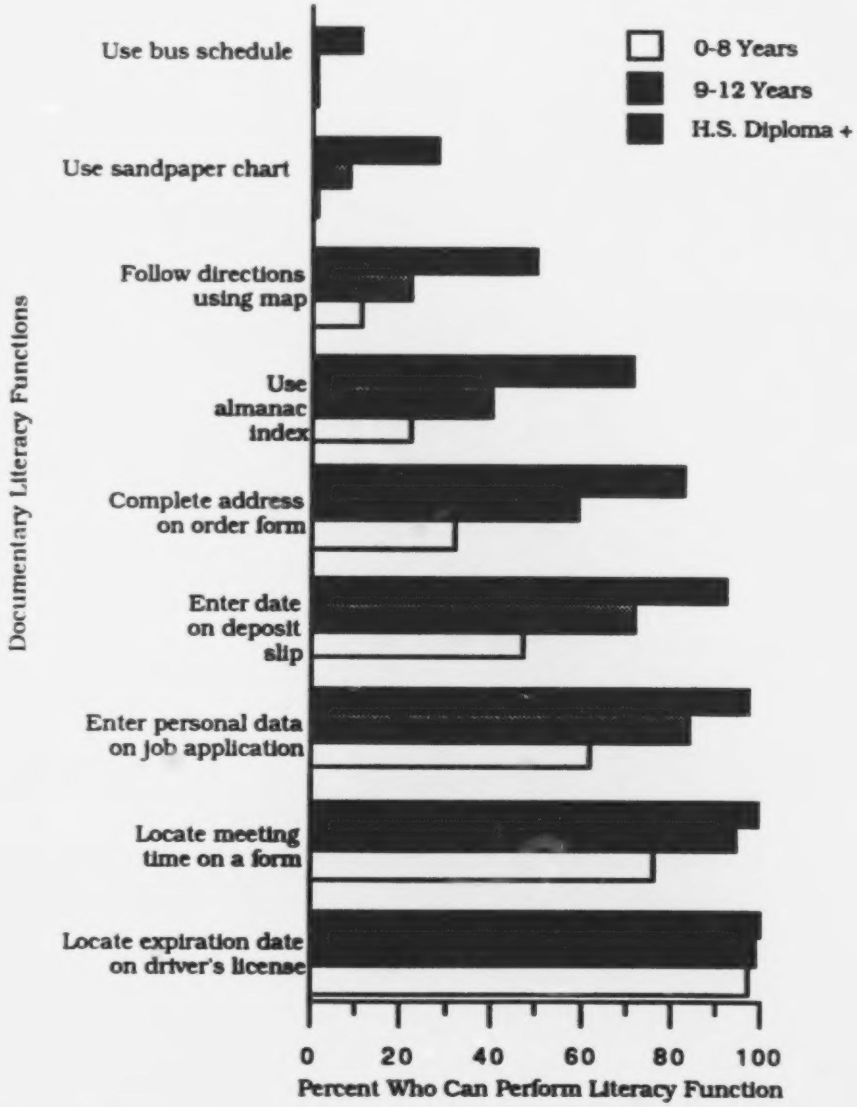
American youths' document literacy. Figure 2.2 compares the document literacy capabilities of youth who dropped out of school before and during high school with those who completed high school. Most youth who remained in school until grade nine could complete information such as an address on a form, but only a third of those who left school earlier were able to do this. A minority of school noncompeters could use an index. Note that some skills which do not appear to be present in the majority of school dropouts are on the list of most important skills given by the urban adults in Figure 2.1 above.

American youths' quantitative literacy. Figure 2.3 reports the findings for youths' quantitative literacy skill levels. Only a small fraction of school dropouts were able to determine their correct change from a menu. Comparison shopping using unit pricing was beyond the capability of almost all youth. These youth would not succeed well in adult urban life, judging from the types of quantitative literacy which the adults in Figure 2.1 felt are required in their daily lives.

American youths' prose literacy. Prose literacy most nearly approximates the literacy skills that are stressed in school classes on language arts. These skills are not, however, the primary skills needed for survival literacy, as Figure 2.1 indicates. As Figure 2.4 shows, most youth, regardless of their grade level completed, can write a short description of a job they would like. Most who completed at least grade eight can also

Figure 2.2

Documentary Literacy Capabilities
by Years in School Completed



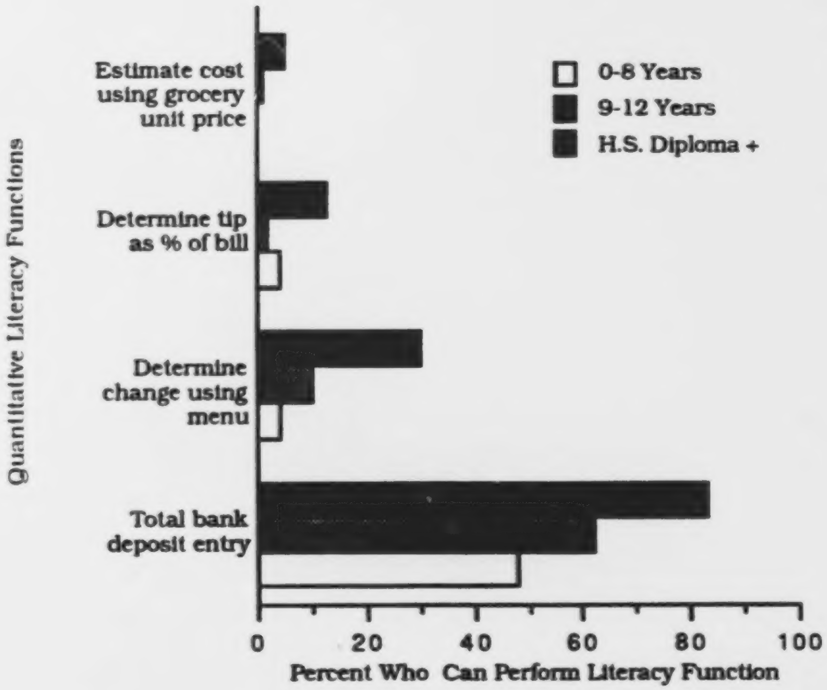
Note: Correspondence between function and percent is approximate.

Source: Adapted from Kirsch and Jungeblut 1987:28-29 locate information in a straightforward news report. Only a quarter of the early dropouts have these skills. Higher level prose analytical skills do not appear common among noncompleters.

Adult survival literacy may be different from street survival literacy. As the following section on functions of literacy among street youth will demonstrate, prose literacy plays an important part in the lives of many youth. Many read or listen to others read, many also produce creative writing. It will be important to differentiate between the high levels of activity, and in many youth, high levels of skill, in these prose literacy tasks, and the skills required for adult survival.

Figure 2.3

Quantitative Literacy Capabilities
by Years in School Completed

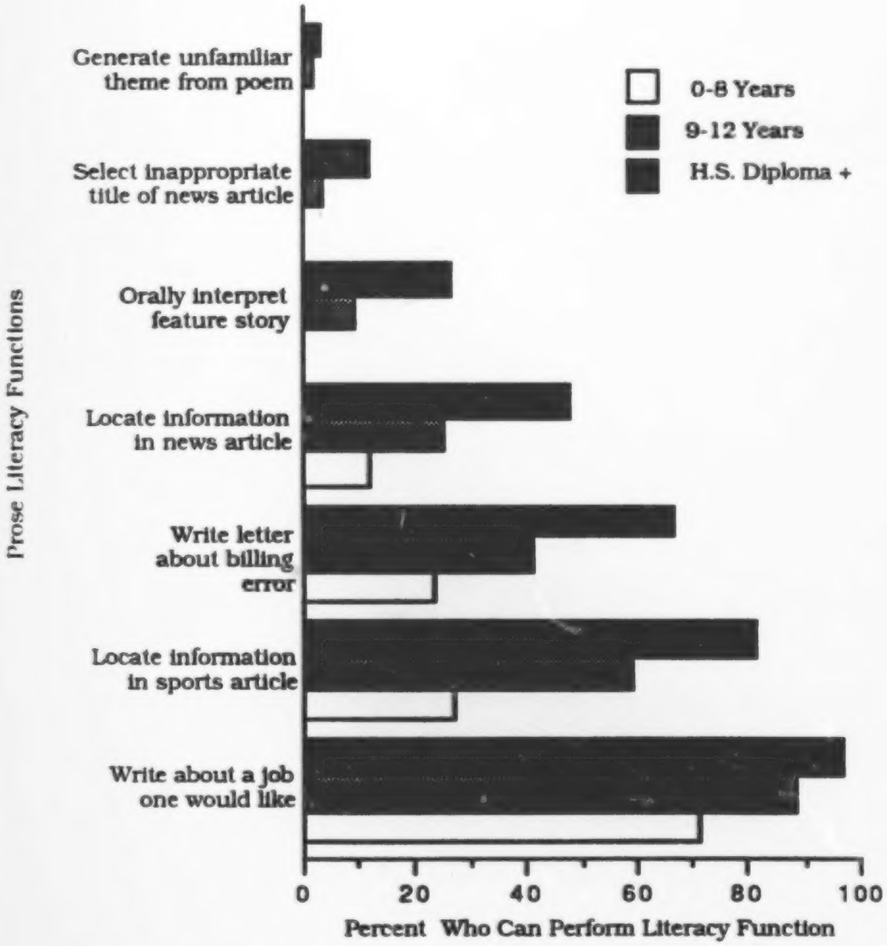


Note: Correspondence between function and percent is approximate.

Source: Adapted from Kirsch and Jungeblut 1987:36-37

Figure 2.4

Prose Literacy Capabilities
by Years in School Completed



Note: Correspondence between function and percent is approximate.

Source: Adapted from Kirsch and Jungeblut1987:16-17

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MODULE TWO

Focus Question 2

Outcome

FOCUS QUESTION 2: What literacy skills are required to prepare youth for urban life?

Outcome: A list of literacy skills you think you would need, if you were living on the streets.

Instructions: Imagine you are living on the streets in Portland. Using the information from Module One on street youth life, think about how you pass one day and night. What do you do for meals? Where do you spend your waking hours, your sleeping hours? How do you get other needs met? How do you fill in the time?

List below prose, documentary and quantitative literacy skills that you imagine yourself needing or wanting to use.

1. Prose *reading* skills I would need:

   Prose *writing* skills I would need:

2. Documentary *reading* skills I would need:

Documentary *writing* skills I would need:

3. Quantitative *reading* skills I would need:

Quantitative *writing* skills I would need:

MODULE TWO

Focus Question 3

FOCUS QUESTION 3: What functions does literacy play in the lives of street youth?

Objective: To become familiar with the actual functions of literacy in street youth life.

Critical Points

- Street youth can and do recognize their uses of literacy, but differentiate these from "school literacy."
- Street youth read for survival, but also for entertainment.
- Street youth use writing fairly extensively, especially to keep in touch with other youth in their shifting locales, and some youth are active creative writers.
- Most youth feel that they can handle reading and writing skills that are required in their life on the streets, but this may not be an accurate assessment.

Terms to Know

School literacy: Literacy tasks that street youth associate with required school activities; and, which they generally feel are not relevant to their current lives.

Street literacy: Reading and writing practices that are commonly used in life on the streets.

Functions for Literacy in Street Youth Life[1]

Street Literacy Practices

While youth answer initial queries about literacy with the viewpoint that they don't need reading and writing for their lives, this response usually refers to reading and writing activities that they associate with school. Asked to reflect on the ways in which reading and writing occur in the course of their everyday activities, they recognize a variety of literacy functions that are important in their lives.

Youth mentioned literacy activities ranging from reading about infant child care to rental applications, legal and medical assistance forms, printing on cereal boxes and other foodstuffs listing nutritional elements, fiction, magazines, pornography, and film, television, and concert descriptions. One 16-year-old dropout from eighth grade described how she used writing and reading for entertainment:

> You must always be aware of what's going on around you. I read and write a lot. A lot of my friends read and write. We write notes to each other. Reading and writing in my life is half and half. I need everything.

Figure 2.5 shows street youths' own reports of their level of participation in common literacy practices. In addition to the proportion of youth who engage in the activities, the figure includes their estimate of the frequency with which they practice these reading and writing activities. For most activities the frequency responses clustered around a mean, given on the figure; for a few activities there was a clear bifurcation of regularity of the activity which is shown in the dual frequency reports for those items.

Survival reading. Street youth, like all young people, are as avid consumers as their means allow. In Figure 2.5 they report that they read prices in fast food, grocery, and convenience stores on a daily basis. All but one of the youths (96%) report reading the newspaper; the group average is several times per week. And all but two (91%) have occasion to read the phone book, personal correspondence, forms or notices that come through their hands, and books at least once a month.

Most (87%) also read advertisements in stores and store windows every day. The majority also commonly read magazines and comic books (83%), the jackets on records and tapes that describe music and performers (74%), and fliers posted on poles and walls that announce the location of shelters, concerts, and various activities (70%). Those, somewhat fewer than half, who ride the bus do not hesitate in their ability to scan the schedules and routes. And 41% also recalled occasionally reading instructions, such as directions for medication or for baby formula.

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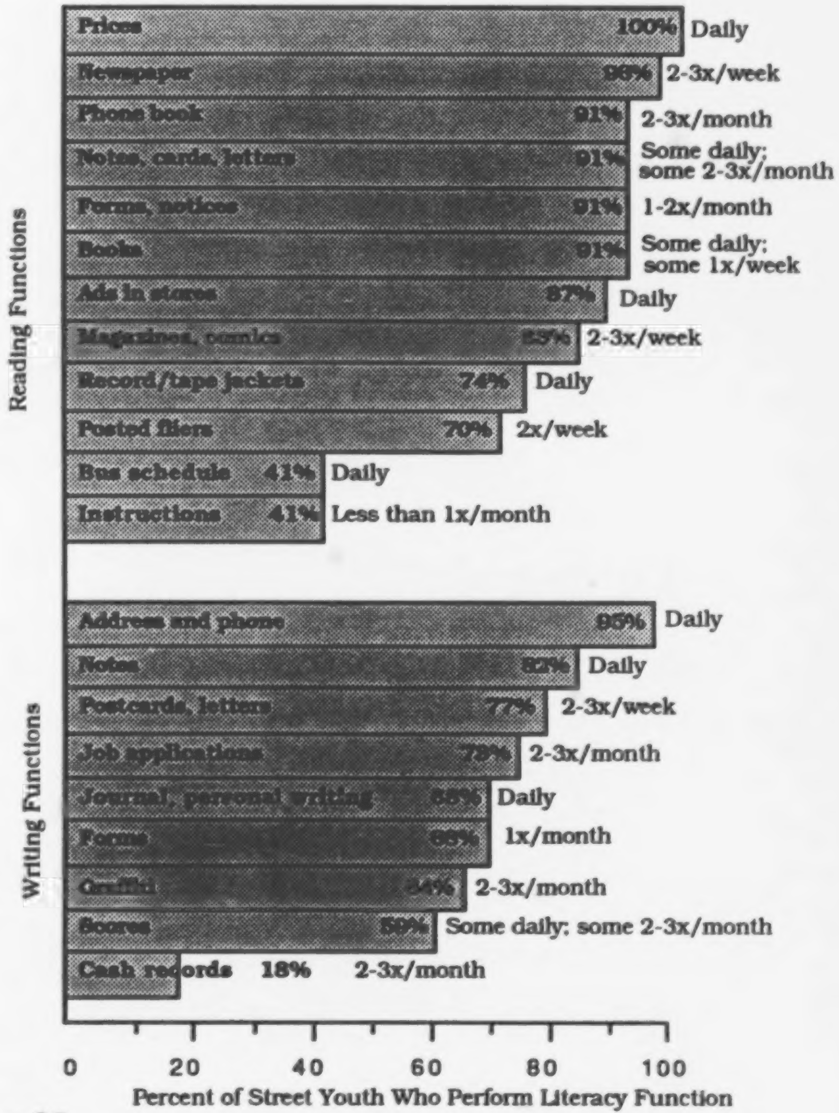
[1] This entire essay is excerpted and adapted from Nancy Faires Conklin & Janise Hurtig, *Making the connection: A report for literacy volunteers working with out-of-school youth*, (pp. 54-61). Portland, OR: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 1986.

Figure 2.5

Percent of Street Youth Who Use Selected Literacy Functions, with Frequency of Practice



n = 22

Source: Adapted from Conklin and Hurtig 1986:55

Survival writing. Figure 2.5 also shows responses to queries about writing practices. Writing names, addresses, and phone numbers is a daily activity for almost all the youth interviewed (95%). Correspondence also falls within the range of their regular activities: 82% wrote personal notes daily and 77% wrote letters or postcards for mailing, averaging several times a week. Three-fourths (73%) recalled filling in a job application in the last month, and some other form (e.g., for getting a public service, for the center in which they were interviewed, for legal purposes) in the recent past. Many youth (68%) engaged in personal writing, keeping a daily journal, notes, or other expressive work. Two-thirds (mostly boys) had written graffiti in the past month. Just over half reported that they had written figures for some kind of scoring, but few (18%) had kept any financial records.

Reading as a pastime. Street youth read the daily city newspaper, national papers as available, a weekly arts and culture paper, and a variety of neighborhood news sheets. In fact, reading the newspaper is a common street activity. Homeless youth have no place to go and often little to do and spend many hours "hanging out" on the streets or in public places. The newspaper is an important pastime. Youth can be seen in parks or the bus station scanning a paper that they have found (they cruise likely places where purchasers will have abandoned their morning news) or in clusters reading some amusing section to a small crowd of listeners.

There was no part of the daily news that youth did not report reading. The most commonly mentioned was the comics, but many also noted regular perusal of the classified ads (they look for odd jobs), the front page, the living section (girls love advice columns), and the sports. Two noted special interest in the business section.

Reading personal correspondence. Some of the youth reported that correspondence-reading is a daily activity; most do so several times a week. This conforms with the high value that our informants place on the name, address, and phone number lists of their "street family" and other contacts that almost all have in their possession. While they may have very few possessions beyond the clothes they are wearing, most have tattered, but carefully secured lists of contacts in the local city and in other cities where they have resided. Since the street population is highly transitory, last known addresses and phone numbers are extremely valuable for tracing their acquaintances. Many also keep names of shelters, counselors, relatives, or other helpful contacts in the adult world. Youth agencies maintain bulletin boards where clients can (and many do) leave messages for one another as they shift from residence to residence.

Reading magazines. Book and magazine reading is a very common activity. Some youth reported reading books daily; others look at books once a week. Magazines and comic books were also a very popular and frequent pastime. A youth who had returned to living at home, and one in a state group home, reported that they had magazine subscriptions. Most picked up magazines in their wandering throughout the city, sometimes stealing them from display racks. Among the magazines the youth cited were, for girls, *Seventeen*, *Miss Teen*, *Young Miss*, *Vogue*, *McCalls*, *Mademoiselle*, and "ones that tell you how to make clothes and stuff", and, for boys, *Space Technology*, *Aviation*, *Hot Rod*, *Road and Track*. Both sexes mentioned *People*, *Time*, *Life*, *Easy Rider*, *National Geographic*, *Sports Illustrated*, and *Playboy*.

One young man who daily studied the business section of the newspaper also read *Business Week*. Some had special interests such as *Creem*, *Hit Parade*, *Heavy Metal* or other entertainer-related periodicals. Another boy described himself as a comic book collector. Several youth mentioned that they regularly read "smut magazines". Two girls said they enjoyed crossword puzzle collections when they could get them. And one girl working to break an alcohol and drug dependency responded to the query with her regular reading--the Alcoholics Anonymous magazine and her weekly church bulletin.

Reading books. Book tastes were equally eclectic. Several girls mentioned specific romances they had recently read. Boys noted westerns as a favorite, three mentioning Louis Lamour as a writer they had recently read. Science fiction, fantasy, and mysteries were popular, as were a number of best sellers, including *Pet Sematary*, *Restaurant at the End of the Universe*, and *Clan of the Cave Bear*. One girl said she read the *Bible* daily. A younger boy confessed to a fondness for Hardy Boys and Nancy Drew mysteries. One young man, living on the street and attending a self-paced GED course, spent his time reading all the "mechanics" books he could lay hands on.

Reading forms. The forms and applications that street youth reported reading ranged from rental leases to legal papers that accompany arrest, informational materials provided by shelter counselors, Medicaid and welfare forms, and Social Security information. One boy also noted that he carefully reads left-over credit card forms to see if he can use them with the ID he has stolen.

Writing for entertainment. Girls, particularly, are fond of reading and filling out all sorts of quizzes and self-assessments that appear in magazines. The service agencies kept a few tattered magazines on hand in which the questionnaires on beauty, dating and sex, personal relations, nutrition, and the like were always found to be filled in, often by several different hands. Reading a quiz aloud for group response was a common practice.

Writing collaboratively. Indeed, writing is often a collaborative, group practice among out-of-school youth. Street youth continue to engage in the types of practices that are easily observed among junior high school students, especially girls. Shuman (1983, 1985) recorded, for example, diary-writing; graffiti; circulation of locally-developed pseudo-questionnaires about in-class romances; facsimiles of forms like marriage licenses and welfare applications, "kissing licenses" and a "constitution of love"; and a whole range of personal notes, letters, and lists of gossip facts. These writings were passed around and read collaboratively. They were often also written collaboratively, in a group or sequentially.

A wide range of activities. Very similar practices can be seen among adolescents and young adults who are out of school. Out-of-school youth are engaged in a wide variety of literacy activities. Some are for survival and information purposes, such as reading prices, advertisements, and instructions. Literacy activities also serve as forms of entertainment or pastimes for street youth--reading (or looking through) books, magazines, and newspapers. The streets are a literacy-rich milieu and youth seek to function effectively in that environment.

Street Youths' Functional Literacy Skill Levels

Most out-of-school youth argue that their reading and writing skills are sufficient to cope with daily literacy demands. Yet, at the same time, many admit that their skill levels limit their options, especially standing in the way of getting off the streets.

Youths' self-assessment of competency. Figure 2.6 shows youths' self-report of their capability to easily handle selected literacy activities commonly arising in street life. Over three-fourths of the youth responded that they could handle all the activities easily. They felt they were equally strong in the three areas of reading, figuring, and writing.

All interviewees stated that they could easily estimate from the posted menu what they could afford to buy in a fast food restaurant if they had a set dollar amount to spend. Yet a quarter of the sample (23%) could not go back and check a bill, such as a receipt for fast food or groceries, for correctness.

Reading the classifieds also posed little problem to most (91%), and many engage in this activity regularly. Eighty-six percent said they could easily read an article in a periodical such as a rock magazine, approximately equal to the number who said they do read such magazines (see Figure 2.5, above).

Most (86%) could write out directions to a youth center or to the place they were living. This activity, too, is an important one in their daily lives. Over three-fourths (79%) report no problems filling out application forms that they occasionally run across.

Reliability of youths' self-report. The strongly-felt need of out-of-school youth to appear competent in their street lives and to reaffirm the correctness of their decision to leave school may lead some to overstate their literacy competency. While the interviews reflected in Figure 2.6 were conducted with the youths' full cooperation and in an atmosphere in which they felt relatively comfortable, it is nevertheless difficult for them to admit to having difficulties that they cannot handle themselves, even when meeting with youth counselors whom they know well and trust. Their responses to open-ended sections of the interview suggest that their assertions of literacy competence may be partly bravado.

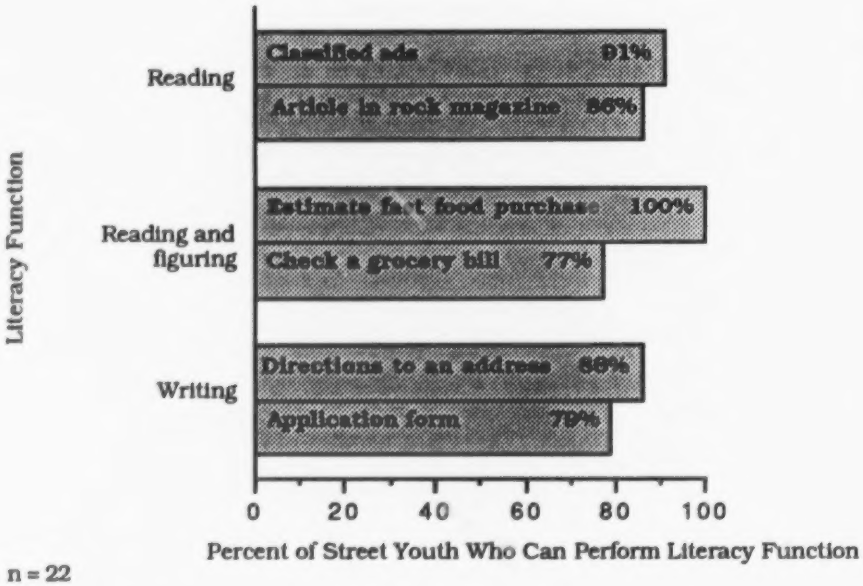
But, on the other hand, many youth can be observed carrying out fairly complicated reading and writing tasks. There is a great deal of variation in skill level that remains to be understood.

Agency staff assessments of youth competency. Youth agency staff made the following observations about their clients' literacy skills and practices:

> Because they are moving around a lot, they need to communicate, to keep in touch. So they do a lot of writing to each other. They are literate enough to communicate ideas and feelings, though their grammar and punctuation may be rough.

Figure 2.6

Street Youths' Self-Reported Adequacy on Selected Functional Literacy Skills, in Percent



n = 22

Source: Adapted from Conklin and Hurtig 1986:58

Most of the kids coming through our program are "technically" literate, but they either have no experience doing things like filling out forms, or are intimidated by authority figures, have low self-esteem, and don't ask for help.

Not only is the truly illiterate population very small, some kids have amazing skills. . . . Kids who are functionally illiterate are that way because there is a need that hasn't been addressed that would have been if they were in a healthy home environment. For example, dyslexia, vision problems, learning disability, a developmental need that has been overlooked.

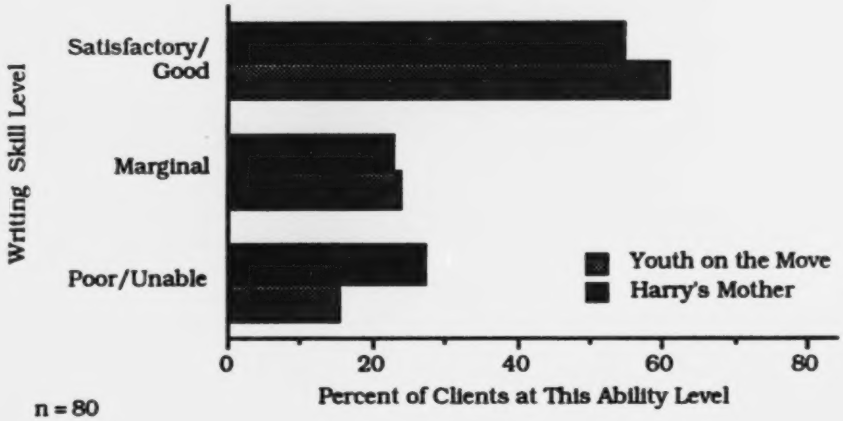
> Kids coming into our program either have adequate literacy skills or don't at all. Either they enter with the ability to pass a GED reading test, or they'd never make it. . . . I haven't seen kids come in with low level skills, develop them, and get the GED. . . . [I think this is because] there's no trained staff capable of dealing with, tutoring such kids.
>
> [In our program, kids'] literacy skills vary from very sharp to those who can't fill out the intake form. The average kid is working below grade level.

Several counselors noted that the same youths who have great difficulty with assigned writing tasks such as the intake form and required autobiographical essay may be capable of expressing their emotions or personal problems in written form. For most of these youth the technical points of writing, e.g., spelling, punctuation, sentence structure, are very weak.

Competency evidenced in writing samples. An analysis of youths' writing samples at two youth service agencies confirms that, while out-of-school youth may function competently in some literacy activities, many have weak writing skills and cannot perform other activities adequately. Figure 2.7 displays data for writing samples drawn from client files at Harry's Mother, a counseling center and shelter for runaway youth, and Youth on the Move, a now defunct alternative, self-paced GED and job orientation program formerly sponsored by Friendly House.

Figure 2.7

Percent Distribution of Writing Ability of Clients at Two Youth-Serving Agencies



n = 80

Source: Adapted from Conklin and Hurtig 1986:60

Analysis of clients' files reveals that approximately a quarter (22%) of the youth visiting Harry's Mother and Youth on the Move were unable to fill out the application and information forms themselves, or the counselor had to provide so much assistance or rewriting that they must be considered to have been functionally illiterate for this task. Another quarter of the youth (22%) provided written responses that were marginally literate--so full of misuses of words, grammatical errors, misspellings, and incompletenesses that made the essays very difficult to interpret. Such youth would not be able to complete a form such as an employment application in a minimally competent fashion.

Over half the sample (56%) were able to complete the application and information forms in some acceptable manner. Samples were considered "satisfactory" if they were legible and syntactically and lexically comprehensible, even though they may have contained spelling, grammatical, and other minor errors.

This analysis indicates that just half the youth entering these two social service agencies demonstrated writing skills at a level that would be regarded as sufficient for entry-level, unskilled jobs. One in four must be considered non-writers on this literacy function.

Lower skilled youth avoid basic skills programs. Note that, when the two agencies are contrasted, youth at the non-traditional GED program had higher skills as a group. Youth on the Move attracted fewer of the non-writers--15% of its clients, compared to 26% of Harry's Mother clients who were classed as "poor/unable". Both agencies had equal numbers of marginal writers, but 63% of Youth on the Move's clients could write satisfactorily, while just 53% of those at Harry's Mother had skills at the acceptable level. Thus, even though Youth on the Move was, at the time, the most accessible to street youth of any educational program in the city, it creamed more able dropouts, though to a far lesser extent than do conventional GED and pre-employment programs with their higher-skill entry criteria.

Further, both the agencies sampled attracted youth who are contemplating or have begun to move off the streets. We must assume that youth remaining on the streets, those out of contact with the straight world or touching it marginally and anonymously at drop-in centers, have even fewer skills and options than the segment of the out-of-school youth population whose abilities are assessed here. We must conclude that well over half of the out-of-school youth living in the street culture have seriously deficient writing skills.

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MODULE TWO

Focus Question 3

Outcome

FOCUS QUESTION 3: What functions does literacy play in the lives of street youth?

Outcome: A selection of three literacy activities common among street youth that you think you could incorporate into basic skills training.

Instructions: Consider what you have read about the functions of literacy that are common among street youth. Select three types of materials that street youth commonly use or encounter that you could bring into a training setting. Do they represent documentary, quantitative or prose literacy? How did you make your choices?

Functional Literacy Material	Type of Literacy	Why Chosen

1.

Functional Literacy Material	Type of Literacy	Why Chosen
2.		
3.		

MODULE TWO

Focus Question 4

FOCUS QUESTION 4: What attitudes do street youth have toward literacy?

Objective: To understand the ambivalence youth demonstrate toward literacy.

Critical Points

- Youth culture, is essentially oral, not literate.
- Full integration into street culture implies that youth reject literacy as a part of school or adult culture.
- Youth are ambivalent about literacy, saying they don't need better skills themselves for street life in order to appear competent, but admitting that getting off the streets requires better skills.

Street Youths' Attitudes Toward Literacy[1]

Verbal Skills Are a Key Attribute

Youth culture is primarily oral. The lives of out-of-school youth are dominated not by literacy, but by orality. They conduct their essential transactions orally. They receive most information through spoken channels--mostly from peers, but also conversations with adults such as parents and social service agency staff. They are highly reliant upon records, tapes, radio, and television as entertainment and information channels.

Youth are highly sensitive to the subtleties of verbal language and quick to detect patronization, manipulation, and attempts to mislead.

Many are from oral cultures. A disproportionate number of school dropouts come from ethnic minority groups and working class backgrounds, communities whose reliance upon oral modes of communication is well documented. Like members of these orally-oriented cultures, out-of-school youth, even those from middle class homes, place great importance on oral speaking ability and tend to place confidence in information that comes through a personally known, oral channel, rather than through more remote and neutral literacy channels. Reading and writing are associated with the schooling they have chosen not to pursue.

By the time they drop out of school many such youth have effectively disengaged themselves from the literacy culture. They believe that literacy plays only a marginal role in their lives.

High value is placed on verbal skills. Studies of street youth have consistently demonstrated that verbal language skills are highly important to social success. Black youth, for example, hold in high respect peers who can excel in performance of ritual rhyming and verbal gaming (see, e.g., Labov 1972).

Street youth observed in this study also valued verbal arts. Many youth panhandle in the downtown areas to scrape together enough money for food, cigarettes, and drugs. The ability to "scam" a passerby into giving money is a mark of street "smarts" and good talkers are actively observed by other youth. They spend much time regaling peers with their latest panhandling success stories. Repetition of the story in amusing and graphic terms is as praiseworthy as the verbal scam itself.

Like verbal scamming and storytelling, composition and recitation of poetry are respected and frequent activities. Many youth, boys as well as girls, compose blank verses that describe their lives and feelings. Some were very willing to recite them for researchers and took great pride in their verbal expression. The street culture has developed many words and expressions that are its "code" of identity--marking the initiates and excluding outsiders.

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[1] **This entire essay is excerpted and adapted from Nancy Faires Conklin & Janise Hurtig, *Making the connection: A report for literacy volunteers working with out-of-school youth*, (pp. 48-54), Portland, OR: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 1986.**

Even youths' literacy practices have a strong oral orientation. Reading and writing are not separate, private, decontextualized activities, but a part of the highly communal life that street youth lead. Many times youth were observed reading aloud to one another. They worked together to complete written forms and to read instructions. They also amused themselves by reading to one another from magazines and newspapers.

Street youth are like other adolescents. These practices follow from those that adolescents engage in while still in school. Among youth observed in an inner-city junior high school, reading and writing were practices that were directly tied to face-to-face interaction, rather than alternative channels for communication (Shuman 1983). Many of these youth came from homes in which parents were not fully literate in English, in which the most able member of the family functioned as reader, writer, and translator for the household. Their free-time literacy activities followed that model. They composed written materials that were to be read by or to a group. They assumed, in their writing, that the reader was familiar with the context of the communication, thus their writing very much resembled speech.

> One of the central characteristics of adolescents' writings for themselves was that they used oral standards of communication and [they] were used in conjunction with spoken interactions. The expectation that written texts would be collaboratively written in exchanges dominated by oral communication, and that they would be collaboratively read or read aloud, sustained the contextualization of the written texts. . . . For the most part, writing was treated as undigested communication which was to be converted into face-to-face speech. Reading involved a complementary system of those who read and those who interpreted. The ability to read and write was not an important measure of social status, and the quality of people's writing was rarely measured or evaluated within the community. In contrast, speech was constantly evaluated. (Shuman 1983:78-79)

Accepting Street Culture Is Rejecting School Culture

"Street smarts." Survival on the streets requires that an individual become skilled in the ways of the subculture and this street wisdom is, at bottom, a more important education than any that could be received in school. An influential study of urban street gang life quoted one gang leader contrasting school smarts and street smarts:

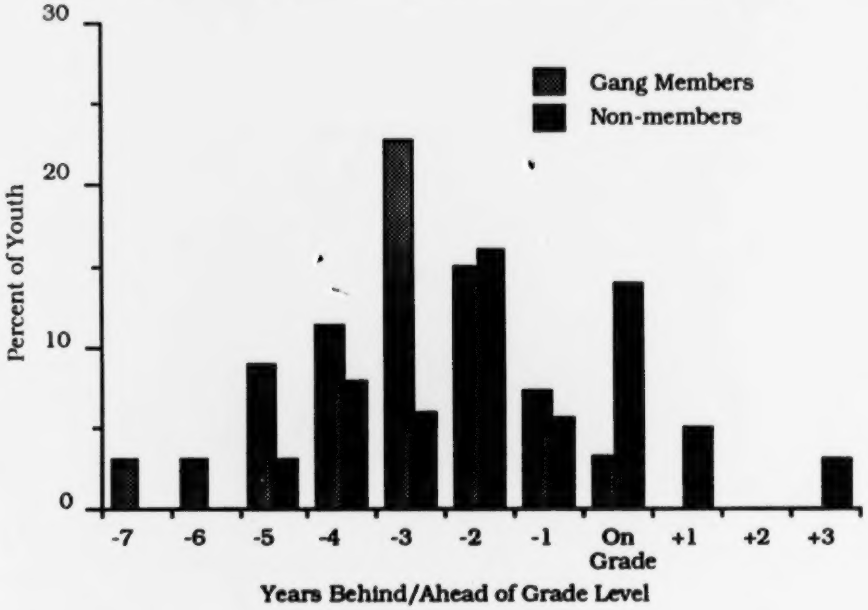
> When you on the streets you learn what's what. That's something they don't teach you in school. School don't teach you about life. And this is something they can't teach you. School put education in

> you head, but the streets tell you what you going to do when you grown. The streets teach you how to live. . . . Education, it does mean something, though. You might get a job before me . . . [but] you can't really make it unless you know what's happening in the streets. . . . Maybe those people in school be more advanced than me, but . . . all them people with that education, they don't even know what's happening. (Keiser 1969:76-78)

Street leaders may be less literate than other street youth. Indeed, success on the streets may correlate inversely with educational achievement. An insightful study of Harlem youth gangs (Labov and Robins 1969) found that the more stature a boy had on the streets, the lower his reading achievement level. Figure 2.8 shows the distribution of reading skill levels among street gang members and non-members. Two years behind grade was the overall reading average for youth in New York City schools at the time of the study. Among non-members, there are a good many who are behind grade but a substantial proportion who are at-grade in reading and some who are above. No gang members are reading above grade. The few mentors who are at-grade are classified by the study as marginal members of their gangs. All central and leading members of youth gangs are reading well below-grade. Further, gang members' below-grade status increases with age.

Figure 2.8

Reading Achievement of Members and Non-Members of Street Gangs, in Years Behind or Ahead of Grade Levels



Source: Adapted from Labov and Robins 1969:157

Thus older boys who are leaders in gangs, i.e., the youth with highest status in the street culture and the role models for younger boys, are the lowest reading achievers. Yet, these semi-illiterates exhibit strong verbal ability and exercise decision-making, and their followers depend upon leaders' strategic planning and leadership skills for their very lives. The researchers found that:

> . . . the major problem responsible for reading failure is cultural conflict. The school environment and school values are plainly not influencing the boys firmly grounded in street culture. (Labov and Robins 1969:56)

Verbal activity is necessary for street survival. While few youth interviewed for the present study were active in violent gangs, they echoed the sentiments about street smarts of the youth gang member quoted above. Education is important, they say, but they have all they need.

The streets they inhabit are violent and they, the young and inexperienced, are the most vulnerable. Only those who quickly acquire the skills of the street will be able to lead autonomous lives. Those who are too weak will disappear--many come into criminal or protective custody; some die violently or of diseases related to malnutrition, exposure and lack of care; some return home--or they will become the prey of adult "protectors" such as pimps, drug dealers, and professional criminals. This climate of violence creates the need for an appearance of invulnerablity. Street youth are very reluctant to admit to inability to cope in their chosen world. Indeed, one of the agency staff at The Greenhouse reported that youth who refused to visit the drop-in center accused those who took advantage of the free food and temporary shelter of being unable to "handle" the streets without adult support--the ultimate "put down" for young people on their own.

These young people have rejected the "straight" world of home and school. Or, more accurately for many cases, the straight world has rejected them. Many of their parents have abused and abandoned them, but, for the youth, the streets are a choice they have made. Conventional education in general and literacy more specifically cannot be overtly valued by out-of-school youth who do not plan to return, for to admit the importance of education would be to acknowledge the validity of a world they are rejecting, a world which, in various ways, re-rejects them every day.

Ambivalent Attitudes Toward Literacy

What literacy represents. Because literacy has a social significance that ties reading and writing skills to achievement, success, and acceptability in the straight world, literacy is not socially neutral, but rather a socially highly loaded issue for street youth. Literacy represents a struggle they are waging between the values of their marginal lifestyle and the values of the culture they have left; their attitudes about literacy directly reflect this internal conflict. Street youth do not easily admit that their reading and writing skills are insufficient for their current lives. Rather they tend to assert that they don't need any skills they don't have.

Youth: "*Others* need literacy." When asked what skills are important for *young people in general*, street youth spontaneously responded that reading and writing were critical skills. For example:

> Reading, writing, arithmetic? It's all as plain as day. How can you get a job if you can't read? Pay the bills if you can't add? People should have the three basic Rs; that's all that they need.
>
> Reading and writing is very important--I don't think anyone could get anywhere in the world without reading and writing.
>
> If you can't read and write it's like going to another country and trying to get by without knowing the language.
>
> People need to know how to read and write to make it in this world.

Youth: "*I* have enough skills." But when asked what was important *for themselves*, many street kids asserted that they have all the skills they need for their present lives. Their perspectives echoed the gang leader quoted above: Education offers some rewards, but life on the streets is the real, meaningful world and requires its own education.

> I've learned a hell of a lot more than what the average [high school] graduate knows, because one thing you can't learn there [in school] is what life's really like.
>
> No, we don't really need to do much reading or writing. It doesn't come up much in this kind of life.
>
> If a person wants to be here [on the streets] . . . they'd better learn how to take care of themselves. If this is what they really want to do, *that's* what they need to get by, not reading and writing.
>
> They're [street kids] not dummies. If they weren't smart or capable of learning they wouldn't be able to survive down here. You learn something every day. Even if it's illegal. It's hell down here, period.
>
> If you're still on the streets you don't need it [reading and writing]. You need legal advice, but that's about it.

Youth value useful knowledge. Street youth both accept and reject literacy. Literacy, as the foundation of schooling, represents for them the straight, school-and-home world. They highly value learning and, indeed, judge each other in terms of level of "street education". For those who have decided they want to leave the streets literacy is a doorway out. For those who are committed to the street life, reading and writing are valued only insofar as they are skills that help them function in that milieu.

Agency staff's assessment. Youth agency staff also characterized their clients' ambivalence toward improving their literacy skills:

> Literacy is important to them. They know it's important, not just in the abstract, but also practically, for their lives in the streets. It does fit in with their street survival skills. But still they would deny that it's significant. . . . They also use it as a coping mechanism. It's an expression, like the use of poetry to release emotional stuff.
>
> Kids are very defensive about their lack of [literacy] skills. They will deny that they are unable to perform some task, rather than admit it and get help, because it's too threatening to their self-esteem to admit that shortcoming.
>
> Kids have an awareness that they can't get ahead without literacy skills, but it [getting ahead] isn't overly real to them. They don't really believe they will get ahead, although they pay lip service to it.

Literacy as a Tool for Leaving the Street

Job seekers want literacy. When street youth *do* admit the need for further literacy skills, it is usually with reference to employment. Many street youth are actively seeking legitimate employment, but only a minority are successful in securing a job:

> [A young man who described himself as "slow" in reading:] Reading and math, that's why I dropped out of school. I would have stayed in school if I could have. You've got to have school or GED to get a job that pays good.
>
> If you didn't have reading and writing you'd be a vegetable. You'd never get a job.
>
> Communication is most important. Without it you ain't got nothing going into a job or just getting along with other people. As far as reading and English, it would have to come next. They're really important subjects. . . . A lot [of street kids] can't write worth shit. Their penmanship stinks. They need to improve on things like filling out applications.
>
> For what I want--getting a job is the main thing--as long as you pass sixth or seventh grade you know how to get by. I mean like a job at [a hamburger fast food chain]. Unless you want some other job at a higher level. You need to know receipts and stuff like that. I could use help with that. . . . [But] I know just about everything I need to know.

Literacy may represent leaving street life. The ambivalence that dropout youth feel toward literacy and the schools is also acted out by many of the GED participants whom we met and discussed with agency staff. There is a high rate of dropout from the GED programs among youth with just a very few credits left before completing their certificate.

Several clients of Youth on the Move had passed most of the exams when they dropped out of the program. They simply didn't know if they really wanted to have the credential. Its attainment represents the point at which they would re-enter the straight world--seek regular employment, give up (and be given up by) their peers in the street culture, and admit to adoption of mainstream values. Several youth said they had done almost all of the GED and planned to finish "someday", but just weren't "ready" right now.

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MODULE TWO

Focus Question 4

Outcome

FOCUS QUESTION 4: What attitudes do street youth have toward literacy?

Outcome: A list of suggestions for approaching youth with the need to develop skills, while supporting the youths' need to appear competent.

Instructions: Street youth need to convince themselves, and adults, that they are competent and capable persons. Thus, they say that they can do the literacy tasks they need to. Yet, even youth often admit that they do not possess the skills they need to meet their aspirations.

How would you approach this paradox in working with youth as a basic skills trainer? Offer three suggestions of how to suggest needed skills, without undermining the youth's already precarious self-confidence.

1.

2.

3.

MODULE THREE

BASIC SKILLS TRAINING: APPROACHES FOR STREET YOUTH

In this module we describe appropriate basic skills training for street youth and help you choose the training format that will be best for you as a volunteer. First we review the reasons that street youth do not participate in existing educational programs. Next we describe the types of social service agencies where these youth can be reached with appropriate training. Then we describe four formats for the training and help you decide which one you prefer.

FOCUS QUESTION 1: Why don't street youth participate in existing educational programs?

Outcome: A list of essential characteristics for an educational program that would attract them.

FOCUS QUESTION 2: Where can street youth be reached?

Outcome: A list of characteristics of youth social service agencies that make them appropriate places for basic skills training for street youth.

FOCUS QUESTION 3: What are formats for basic skills training that might be used in different agencies and which is best for me?

Outcome: A list of the pro's and con's of each format for you and a chart showing the format(s) you prefer.

MODULE THREE

Focus Question 1

FOCUS QUESTION 1: Why don't street youth participate in existing educational programs?

Objective: To understand why existing educational programs do not attract street youth.

Critical Points

- Less than a quarter of early school leavers attend other educational programs. Literacy programs attract even fewer youth.
- Existing programs attract--and many are restricted to--the most able among the out-of-school youth population, effectively eliminating the majority of early school leavers.
- The negative associations school dropouts have with schooling usually keep them from getting further educational training if it is provided through school-like structures and settings.
- Programming for out-of-school youth must meet their demand that education be relevant to them in their current lives or in accomplishing their aspirations for improving their lives.
- Educational programs for street youth must be flexible--self-paced, part-time, individualized--because youth on the streets do not lead lives that are amenable to the regulation and discipline of conventional schooling programs.

Street Youth Want Training[1]

Existing Educational Programs

Only a few enroll. Less than one in four school leavers pursues further education (Peng 1983). In a survey by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), 25% of boys and just 17% of girls had gone on to any educational training within the first two to three years of dropping out of school. A mere 14% of boys and 9% of girls had enrolled in courses that would lead to the alternative high school diploma, the GED. By age 30, 26% of white dropouts had taken some schooling, but only 11% of Blacks had gone back to educational training. That is, Blacks are more likely to drop out, and, moreover, are only half as likely to return for schooling.

Literacy programs serve few youth. Generally, youth are under-represented in literacy tutoring programs. In its first year the California Literacy Campaign attracted only 1% of its students from the 16- to 21-year-old group (Lane, McGuire, Yeannakis, and Wurzbacher 1984). Although peer tutoring was an aspect of the program, tutors were not young: 1% of tutors were under 21; just 7% were 18- to 23-year-olds.

Nationally, only 9% of enrollees in all types of literacy programs--public adult education (Adult Basic Education and Adult Secondary Education), employment and training programs, correctional institution programs, post-secondary institutions, community-based volunteer programs, and the military--are in the 16- to 20-year-old group (Lerche 1985).

Figure 3.1 shows the percentage of youth participating by type of program. Note that only the military, employment and training programs, and correctional institutions enroll significant proportions of youth. Youth make up 56%, 18%, and 19% of their enrollees, respectively). State and local adult education programs, post-secondary institutions (primarily community colleges), and community-based programs attract few learners from among the ranks of youth. (Youth under 20 make up just 6% or less of their students.)

Neither the military nor employment and training programs accept very low level readers, thus only correctional institutions are serving sizable numbers of youth who are categorical or near-illiterates. Indeed, the study reports that the 16- to 20-year-old age bracket has the smallest proportion of very low level readers (34%) enrolled in literacy training of any age group (Lerche 1985).

Community-based literacy programs, including volunteer literacy organizations, are least successful in attracting youth. They often concentrate on services for very low level readers, services youth either feel they do not need or will not accept through currently offered program formats.

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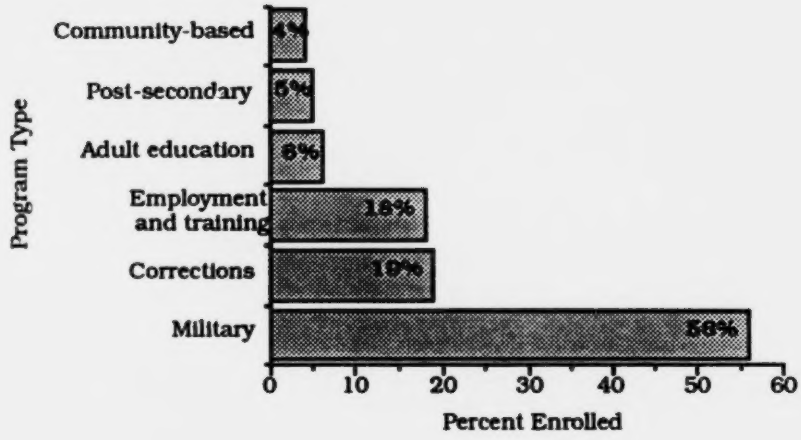
[1] Excerpted and adapted from Nancy Faires Conklin & Janise Hurtig, *Making the connection: A report for literacy volunteers working with out-of-school youth*, (pp. 1-44), Portland, OR: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 1986.

Figure 3.1

Proportion of 16- to 20-Year-Olds
Enrolled in Literacy Programs, by Program Type



Source: Adapted from Lerche 1985

Youth may enter GED programs, but few proceed. Each year $100 million are spent on publicly-supported adult education programs. All categories of public adult education programs are full to capacity and maintain waiting lists. Just 28.9% of these public dollars go toward Adult Secondary Education (ASE), the programs that would directly serve most native English-speaking out-of-school youth. Under-21-year-olds constitute about one-third to one-half of the ASE students each year. Yet only 4% of all those enrolled in adult education lack a high school diploma. Few youthful dropouts, then, are enrolled in publicly-funded degree-completion programs.

The GED is regarded as a viable educational option only by dropouts who left school with solid academic records. Youth agency staff report that many youth left school planning to take the GED. They have little conception of the difficulties that await them, either from the academic program of GED preparation or from the decrease in structure and educational orientation that their out-of-school lives present. They do not have the self-discipline to pursue such a program, especially if they left school in part because of problems with structure, responsibility, and authority. Most failing or near-failing school leavers do not consider themselves adequately prepared for these alternative degree programs (Austin Independent School District 1982).

The most frequently cited reason that GED test-takers give for pursuing their diploma is "job-related" (*Education Daily*, September 9, 1985). GED test-takers in 1984 averaged 24 years of age; they were mostly workers who were returning to school after a number of years on the job, not recent, unemployed dropouts. Thus GED programs must be seen as "creaming" the dropout population--attracting those who have been able to secure employment, employment with some expectation of advancement and security.

Additionally, significant numbers of school non-completers receive their GED in the military. In 1984, military programs conferred 18,000 certificates. These programs, too, exclude very low skilled youth.

Few schooling plans are achieved. In Oregon, 12.9% of dropouts from grades nine through twelve had returned to high school and an additional 9.7% were enrolled in GED programs when they were interviewed the following year (Oregon Department of Education 1980). The earlier in their schooling that students dropped out, the less likely they were to have plans to return to education. Most school leavers in this state (82.8%) reported that they planned to continue their educations. Some cited several alternative plans:

- 30.3% planned GED work
- 40.0% wanted to attend community college
- 11.7% expected to return to high school
- 13.0% intended to attend vocational training
- 15.9% cited plans for alternative high school diploma programs
- 10.2% hoped to enroll in college

Judging from the above statistics on adult education enrollment, few of these ambitious plans will be realized.

Employment training is limited. Although decreasing in number, there are also publicly-funded employment training programs for which some out-of-school youth qualify. However, only a small minority of the dropout population is served. The largest of these programs, the federal Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA), is designed for dropouts, but restricts enrollment to those who can demonstrate that they read at the grade nine level. Thus JTPA, like most other job training and pre-employment orientation programs, is open only to youth with relatively high academic skills.

Recreating failure. Literacy programs do not recruit youth. The GED attracts only the academically more secure. Job training programs address only the needs of the more skilled. The less well-prepared, the less confident, and all youth who have difficulties with course structure, classroom practices, and social environments like those of the schools they have left fall outside the scope of these opportunities.

For many students, the school environment appears to have undermined their already low self-esteem, leading them to drop out. A replication of the school environment in conventional adult education and employment training programs promises to recreate an environment for failure from which the youth have fled.

Street Youths' Literacy Training Interests

Street youths in the field study we conducted expressed a variety of literacy training interests. They cited reading and writing skills that they need in their current street lives and also skills that they would like to acquire in order to transition from the streets to a more stable way of life.

Jobs are the main motivator. The overwhelming reason that street youth would consider participating in literacy tutoring, if it were available to them, was to secure a job and get out of street life. Although many street youth do have occasional employment, few expected to succeed in securing sufficient regular income to alter their basic circumstances unless they got into training programs. As one young prostitute put it:

> [I want to learn] easier ways to get a job, how to live right, and not be a whore or something.

Youths' interests must serve as a starting point for the organization of an appropriate tutoring plan and the selection of materials.

Skills desired by street youth. Youth cited job skills as their highest priority for training, but offered other training interests as well.

- **Job-related skills:** auto mechanics, carpentry, welding, commercial cooking, computers, receipts and bills, reading the classified ads and their cryptic abbreviations, employment application forms, resume-writing, job-seeking, record-keeping for hourly employment.
- **Street survival skills:** rental applications, legal rights, checking financial transactions, map reading, information for services like the 911 emergency number and Medicaid, reading instructions such as those on medications.
- **Personal development:** career awareness, "personal awareness," "how to live right," hygiene, nutrition, sewing, survival tactics (camping, "what to do if your car is wrecked"), poetry writing.
- **Skills for the adult world:** tax forms, driver's license test, applications for public services such as medical care, infant childcare and prenatal care.

- **Preparation for further training:** to qualify for a pre-employment training program, prepare for GED work, get special help with a known basic skill deficit or learning disability.

Flexible Programming Structure

Several of the street youth we interviewed pointed to Youth on the Move--an alternative, self-paced GED program formerly housed at Friendly House--as an acceptable model for educational service delivery. They particularly cited its flexible pace and hours and the individualization of the teaching to their needs and abilities. These appear to be key elements in the success of programs providing educational as well as other services to street youth. A literacy tutoring component within a youth-serving agency would be ideally suited to provide such personally tailored reading and writing instruction.

Most would participate in appropriate training. Eighty percent of the youth we queried responded that they would be interested in literacy tutoring under such amenable circumstances. Their motivation, they said, would come from wanting to learn and recognizing that what they were learning was of immediate value or a step toward their goals of employment, security, and stability. They explicitly rejected the course/class model that they had experienced in school.

> They don't need to make school like a jail. If people want to go, they can go. And let the other people walk out if they want. If they don't want to learn, they won't.
>
> [In the Job Corps] the whole thing is set up for you. It's like a concentration camp. I want to learn, but I need to have some freedom.
>
> I'm a very slow learner. I don't like to perform in front of others. At Youth on The Move, they are working with me on my spelling problem.

Ideas for formats. Street youth stated that they would commit from one to eight hours a day to literacy. About half preferred tutoring one-on-one and half thought that they would learn best and persist longer if they worked in a small group. Several suggested a combination of the two methods. "I like to share my thoughts", stated one girl.

The youth also divided their opinions on peer vs. adult tutors. Most thought that they would learn best from an older person, though for some the ideal person would be older, but under thirty. Those who favored a peer component as at least a part of the literacy training offered several reasons.

> [I'd work best with] someone who would know what I'm going through and be tough on me.
>
> I'd want a teacher who was on my grade level, but smarter, so we can both teach each other.

> If a younger person gets on your case, you'll take it more seriously than some adult.
>
> I'd like to tutor, like as a teacher's aide, a middle person.

Agency staff caution that, while peer tutoring can work well among out-of-school youth, it must be carefully approached and closely monitored. The tutor must not be so close to the street life that she/he comes to identify with the learner's life, trying to solve all the youth's problems or becoming emotionally overly involved. Many staff favor using adult tutors because it is so important for youth to come to re-trust adults and the tutor-learner relationship can form just such a bridge. Some agencies have had great success with volunteers who are older adults, whom the youth relate to as grandparent figures.

Successful youth training modules. There are few models for youth literacy training that are not reports of programs in institutional settings. Articles that do document success in teaching adolescents and young adults to read follow some of the lines that the youth themselves suggest.

One such report describes how a 16-year-old finally achieved literacy after many in-school failures and recommends: 1) peer teaching, 2) "using the strengths of nonreaders", i.e., their sociability and their knowledge of literacy functions, 3) materials developed from the youths' lives, 4) at all costs avoiding boring materials and methods, and 5) drawing on various reading learning systems, i.e., adopting an eclectic approach and tailoring it to the student's progress and interests (Epstein 1981).

Another successful approach brought a teen mother to reading through a program in which the girl introduced her young son to literacy. By "reading" picture books and later textual children's books to the boy, she not only oriented the child to the literacy environment, but developed her own reading skills and interests (Heath and Thomas 1984).

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MODULE THREE

Focus Question 1

Outcome

FOCUS QUESTION 1: Why don't street youth participate in existing educational programs?

Outcome: A list of essential characteristics for an educational program that would attract them.

Instructions: You have learned about a number of reasons why youth do not participate in conventional educational programs. Based on this information, try to imagine an educational program that would be attractive to street youth. What would be essential characteristics of this program?

MODULE THREE

Focus Question 2

FOCUS QUESTION 2: Where can street youth be reached?

Objective: To understand why social service agencies are an appropriate setting for tutoring street youth.

Critical Points

- Although street youth are reluctant to admit the need for assistance in any aspect of their lives, including basic skills, many have come to trust and accept help from staff at youth-serving social agencies. These staff can help volunteer tutors make the connection with street youth.
- Location at youth agencies brings the training into the youths' lives. Casual exposure to basic skills tutoring sessions can help to spark interest.
- The environment at youth-serving agencies is comfortable and non-threatening, lending itself well to flexible, innovative basic skills programs.
- Agencies vary in types of services, clientele, and facilities. This variation may influence the type of training that can be provided.

Reaching Youth at Service Sites

Creating a Positive Educational Experience[1]

An environment in which trust can be established. Street youth trust few adults and are reluctant to admit the need for advice or assistance in any aspect of their lives, including basic skills. But, while most street youth decry the educational system and the adults they met there, and many are not or cannot be helped by their families, substantial numbers have come to rely on, confide in, and accept assistance from staff at youth-serving social agencies. Literacy programs can draw upon the insights of these professionals to make a connection with out-of-school youth and foster positive basic skills training experiences.

Program structure and setting are appropriate for training. In order to reach out to youth, literacy programs must be readily accessible, non-stigmatizing, supportive, and of relevance to the youths' perceived needs. Social agencies serving youth present appropriate locations in which literacy tutoring programs might be developed. Youth are already at these locations. Professional youth workers can assist literacy tutors to approach and gain rapport with street youth. And, with youth workers' cooperation, curricula can be set up that will speak directly to the client population's immediate literacy needs and create an appropriate bridge toward the better lives they seek.

Location at a youth agency will bring literacy training into the fabric of street youths' lives. As one youth who himself suggested the Greenhouse as a tutoring site stated:

> This is a great spot. Everybody's already here. And it's close enough [to the street culture hang-out area] for someone to get there.

Youth can "drop in" to start. Being located in the youth agency makes it possible for youth who are interested, but not willing to immediately commit to a course of study, to "drop in" at sessions. They might bring specific literacy tasks they are seeking assistance with. These less structured introductions are important to convince many youth who are skeptical of the schools that they could be comfortable and could learn in these tutoring relationships. Development of a trust relationship is critical to learning, but especially so for youth who have experienced disappointment and failure many times over.

The presence of volunteer tutors will expand the range of services the host agencies can provide, bringing literacy into the umbrella of essential services that youth seek out. David Harman, a leading scholar of adult literacy, has aptly characterized the advantages of integrating literacy outreach with allied services:

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[1] Excerpted and adapted from Nancy Faires Conklin and Janise Hurtig, *Making the connection: A report for literacy volunteers working with out-of-school youth*, (pp. 77;85-86), Portland, OR: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 1986.

> If literacy programs are to take root among those most in need of assistance, attention will have to be paid first to their overall environments and conditions of life. Social policy cannot be segmented; most people do not believe that increasing their reading abilities will help solve other issues as an independent variable. Literacy, then, can be introduced effectively as one component of a broader, more encompassing social action program that succeeds, among its other tasks, in inculcating a literacy consciousness into environments where it is currently lacking. (Harman 1985:9)

An outreach model using youth-serving agencies should succeed well in expanding "literacy consciousness." And that expansion will, in turn, facilitate better use of non-literacy services delivered in the same context.

In New York, the Youth Literacy Task Force (1982) assessed the work of social service agencies there who were providing youth literacy services and argued that youth-serving agencies have many advantages as sites for literacy training delivery: They 1) pervade client life through their multi-service functions, 2) can entertain innovative and flexible curricula, since they are not regulated by the state education department, 3) have staff whose background is closer to the clients than that of schoolteachers, and 4) are not diploma-oriented and therefore can be eclectic and attack immediate functional literacy needs as well as prepare youth for further education.

Indeed, the New York Task Force concluded that:

> . . . these [social service] programs provide excellent models for delivery of literacy services that, at the present time, are largely undeveloped. (p.10)

Here, then, in the youth-serving agencies of every city, is an under-utilized resource for reaching an audience whose reorientation to literacy will have rewards throughout their entire adult lives, benefitting the nation, as well as themselves.

Types of Agencies at Which You Might Tutor

Services and clientele vary. Agencies providing social services to street youth may vary considerably with regard to the types of services they provide, the clientele they serve, and the facilities and resources they have. For example, one agency may provide services to young people under the age of 18 only, whereas another may accept clients up to age 21. One agency may focus its efforts on emergency services, another on finding longer-term solutions to helping street youth survive, such as employment training, job placement, and/or independent housing, and still another may focus entirely on reuniting runaways with their families. One agency may be equipped to provide hot meals, another showers. Several may focus on educational programs, but at different levels (such as GED, pre-GED, or beginning basic skills). Some agencies may offer recreational activities. Some may be open only during working hours, others only in the evenings. The physical location of the agency may well influence the nature of services provided, as well as the number of clients who can be served at any given time.

To set up volunteer basic skills training programs at these various social service agencies, all of these factors may influence the type of training that can be provided. It is important to have some understanding of the types of sites available and the kinds of basic skills tutoring best suited to them so that you can make a well-informed choice about the kind of tutoring you'll be doing.

A variety of agencies are operating in Portland. Here are some examples of youth-serving social service agencies in the Portland area:

> **The Greenhouse** is a drop-in center for street youth located in a commercial building in the city center. It is funded privately by The Salvation Army and the Rotary Club and nightly provides free meals, clothing, and a warm room to hang out for a few hours to 70 to 100 under-18-year-olds. Individual and group counseling is also available and staff try to meet the continuing demand for assistance with legal, health, and welfare problems. Hours are 3:30 p.m. - 11:00 p.m. Through volunteers, the Greenhouse also provides regular weekly medical and legal clinics, a parenting class, and a GED program.
>
> Youth frequenting the Greenhouse can be served anonymously and are under no obligation to participate in counseling, nor do the staff advocate return to school or home, unless a counseling relation is voluntarily entered into by the youth. The client population is transient; staff estimate they see 85 new youths per month. These are mostly the youthful homeless--street kids. According to an in-house survey, Greenhouse clients are two-thirds male, roughly proportional to the street youth population, mostly in the 17- to 20-year age range, but as young as 11, and correspond in ethnic distribution to the population of the metropolitan area, with the exception of over-representation of American Indians.
>
> **Outside In** is a non-profit agency funded by public and private monies. It is open 5 days a week and occasional evenings for special events. The agency serves street youth under 21, providing emergency services, such as temporary housing, counseling, medical care, food and transportation funds, and a place to drop in, relax and take a shower. Outside In also offers several programs designed to help youth transition off the streets. These focus on stable housing and goal-setting, appropriate educational and employment training and job experience.
>
> Outside In publishes a newsletter for street youth, which gives clients an opportunity to participate in reporting and writing articles and poetry, and maintains a speakers' bureau, so that street youth can share their experiences and needs with civic groups and other interested parties.

Willamette Bridge is a long-term, residential program designed to give street youth between the ages of 16 and 18 the opportunity to take the time necessary to transition off the streets, building a firm foundation for independent living. Up to eight young people can live at the Bridge house, where they receive counseling, support services, referral to other types of programs and services, and advocacy in the endeavors they take on. Staff are available on-site 24 hours per day.

The young people at Willamette Bridge may stay there up to one year, but are under no obligation to stay. However, they are expected to set up a contractual agreement with staff, establish schedules for themselves and find work, so that they can begin to develop a bank account to use when they leave.

Harry's Mother is a non-profit, publicly- and charitably-funded center offering a 24-hour crisis line, counseling, and short-term emergency shelter to runaways aged 10 to 18. Working with the county juvenile court and with families, it serves runaways who are considering or are in the process of transition back to their families or into permanent group homes and, sometimes, back to school. Clients come predominantly from lower and lower-middle class backgrounds, though one attended in a sports car purchased for her by her family.

Youth come to the agency through referral from the court, at the request their families (sometimes suggested by a school counselor), and by self-referral. They can remain the the program up to 2 weeks. Most Harry's Mother clients return to their family homes, after individual and family counseling and conflict negotiation by the agency staff. Some of these kids are in school. Those who are not--the majority--are brought from assigned housing or their homes to spend the day at the agency, where they pass their time in the lounge, entertaining themselves between counseling appointments with television and a few other limited amusements. Clients at Harry's Mother typically have a record of habitual truancy prior to running away and most were or are performing well below grade level in school.

The site will influence the tutoring format. The way basic skills tutoring is presented must be adapted to suit an agency's characteristics. For example, at a drop-in center where kids wander in and then may not be seen for a week or two, matching a particular youth with a specific tutor and setting up agreed upon meeting times may not be appropriate. The youth may feel unable to make such a commitment to an as yet unknown adult, or may feel quilty and further alientated from the agency if he or she breaks the commitment. According to staff working in this type of setting, a drop-in tutoring situation would be more successful. As young people become familiar with the tutor (or tutors) who "hang out" at a regular time to help whoever is interested and as they see what's going on during those sessions, they can make the personal decision to become involved--based on their own motivation and interest.

In this type of setting, tutors may want to adapt tutoring materials into discrete functional units that can be accomplished in one session, so that kids will leave each session with a sense of having accomplished something useful to them in their daily lives. In other settings, however, staff have told us that matching youth with their own personal tutors (and even having them participate in the selection of an appropriate tutor) will be precisely what is needed to help the youth feel she or he has some control and personal involvement in the program.

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MODULE THREE

Focus Question 2

Outcome

FOCUS QUESTION 2: Where can street youth be reached?

Outcome: A list of characteristics of youth social service agencies that make them appropriate places for basic skills training for street youth.

Instructions: Take a moment to think back about what you learned in Focus Question 1 about the reasons street youth don't participate in conventional educational programs. Now, with that in mind, think about the ways in which social service agencies are not like traditional school or training settings.

List five characteristics of youth social service agencies that would make them appropriate for basic skills training for street youth.

MODULE THREE

Focus Question 3

FOCUS QUESTION 3: What are formats for basic skills training that might be used in different agencies and which is best for me?

Objective: To become familiar with four basic skills training formats so that you will be able to decide which suits you best.

Critical Points

- *One-on-one tutoring*, that is, working with an individual youth, is likely to be the most common format the project will use. It can be adapted to most agencies and may be used in conjunction with other training formats as well.

- *Small group tutoring* is similar to one-on-one tutoring, except that it builds on the utility of collaborative learning.

- The *drop-in helping* format establishes specific hours when a volunteer tutor is at the agency so that youth can stop by to ask questions about reading, writing, or quantitative tasks or simply to talk and begin to explore the possibility of improving their basic skills.

- In the *topical workshop* format, the volunteer tutor presents a workshop on a topic in which she/he has some expertise and in which a group of youth are interested. Activities or exercises using basic skills are built into the workshop.

Terms to Know

- o *Collaborative learning*: Participatory, group learning in which several learners work together on a task--collaborating rather than competing. The term also implies that the instructor/tutor also learns from the students. In collaborative learning, as in work with street youth, there must be mutual respect between tutors and learners.
- o *Tutoring*: The one-on-one or small group basic skills assistance provided by volunteer tutors. Tutoring implies an ongoing relationship in which the youth and tutor meet regularly (twice a week) over an extended period of time. The youth identifies goals she/he wants to work on and the tutor helps determine objectives to work on to enable the youth to reach his/her goals.
- o *Helping*: The work the volunteer tutor does at agencies where drop-in hours are set up. Because of the informal nature of the contact with youth there, the assistance the volunteer tutor provides is called *helping*. *Tutoring* may evolve from that contact, and the "helper" may also refer youth to the training offered through topical workshops.

Formats for Basic Skills Training

One-on-One Tutoring

This traditional format for tutoring--working closely and regularly with one individual learner--is likely to be the most common training format used in the Takin' It to the Streets project. The coordinator and the agency counselor will match the volunteer tutor with a young person who is interested in improving his/her basic skills and is willing to work with a tutor. The steps to setting this up are outlined in Module 4.

Here we'll set the stage for you to visualize yourself in the role of the volunteer tutor:

> You have been assigned your learner, whose name is Carol, and you have made the initial contact. Together, you negotiate a plan to meet about twice a week for several months. At the outset Carol may have some very specific goal in mind, such as being able to fill out a job application by herself, or she may simply have a vague sense of needing to read, write, or do math better. By working one-on-one with Carol, over time you establish a personal relationship with her. You get to know her interests, learn something about her past experiences with education, begin to understand her feelings about learning and perhaps some of the problems she's had in the past when she's tried to improve her skills. You may also learn something about her life, both on the streets now and leading up to her arrival there.
>
> Because you are tutoring Carol one-on-one, you are able to focus on her particular interests, strengths and weaknesses. The work you do with her is totally individualized. You are able to build on what interests her, and you change tactics midstream when a particular topic, method or exercise doesn't seem to work with her.
>
> There are times when Carol doesn't show up for her tutoring session with you. You learn how to work with her, when to express interest and concern about the problems that keep her from concentrating on the tutoring, when to let her know that she needs to contact you in advance if she can't come. You are sensitive to her responses to you, the tutoring methods and materials.
>
> Your interaction is going well, and you have the satisfaction of being a tutor and adult friend for a young person very much in need of having someone who believes in her.

Small Group Tutoring

This format is very similar to one-on-one tutoring, except that the tutor works with two to three young people who prefer not to work alone. They may have similar needs and interests or at least similar goals (for example, getting their driver's license). Then again, they might have very different skill levels and interests, but may be sticking together because there is safety in numbers. Or, one or two of them may just be keeping a friend company.

This format builds on the value of collaborative learning. Many street youth work together in small groups to accomplish tasks. This is especially true of activities requiring reading and writing. Street youth are often unwilling to show any signs of vulnerability. If they are deficient in their basic skills development they will often tackle forms, letters, even pleasure reading and note writing with two or three friends, sharing, interrupting, elaborating, taking turns or just listening and commenting--in a word: collaborating.

Whatever the reason for the small group at first, it may well change as the tutoring progresses and the youths become more comfortable with the tutor. In any case, the tutor will be working with a small number of learners, offering very individualized tutoring based on their interests.

Imagine yourself in that role:

> The agency counselor has matched you up with Tony, John and Pat, who think they want to work together to improve their reading so they can get their GEDs. You spend a session getting acquainted and exploring their reasons for wanting a GED, their past experiences with education and other training programs, and the various things they're interested in.
>
> From the start, you are aware of the value of collaborative learning. You need to encourage the three boys to work together on things, rather than push each of them to demonstrate their skill levels separately. You recognize the need to be patient; over time you know you'll be able to get a sense of their individual abilities and needs. As you get to know them and they become more comfortable with you, you gradually are able to encourage more individual work, as that seems necessary. However, it is also perfectly satisfactory to continue to work with them as a small group.
>
> Your learners are a very close-knit circle of friends who seldom if ever show up alone at first. Consequently, you expect times when no one comes to the agreed-upon session. Later on, there are days when you work one-on-one with one of the boys because the others in the group can't come. These are useful opportunities to become more familiar with them as individuals and their skills and needs. But you have to be flexible and willing to change your "lesson plan" if it seems inappropriate.

Small group tutoring can give you a unique opportunity to get to know several youths and participate in their interactions. The natural collaboration that takes place in those interactions (and which indeed is a fundamental part of daily living for most adults) will be a useful tool for your tutoring.

Drop-in Basic Skills Helping

As noted in Focus Question 2, drop-in basic skills helping will be most appropriate at an agency which is set up to serve youth who drop by sporadically and spontaneously. This format establishes regular hours when a volunteer tutor is available at the agency so that youth can ask any questions they might have related to the uses of reading, writing or quantitative calculations. This format is particularly useful for working with youth who:

- do not have regular schedules or are unwilling or unable to commit to a schedule;
- are reluctant to acknowledge that they need to improve their skills;
- are unwilling to participate in any training remotely resembling school;
- are uncertain about making contact and working with new adults;
- have a specific literacy task with which they need immediate assistance; and/or
- have specific basic skills related questions that don't require tutoring over time.

The drop-in helping format allows kids to "check it out," observing from the sidelines, dropping by to "b.s." and see if the volunteer is approachable and acceptable. *They* can set the parameters on the interaction with the adult volunteer tutor, being under no obligation to interact or perform unless and until they decide to.

For other youth the drop-in "helper" can serve as a readily accessible resource. Agency counselors often have heavy case loads and hectic schedules. They cannot always be available to assist youth with forms or applications, for example. When a particular task arises that requires skills beyond the youths' levels, they can consult with the helper. Over time some youth who have become "regulars" during the drop-in helping hours may decide they could benefit from more focused one-on-one or small group tutoring.

If you become a volunteer for drop-in helping at an agency, your hours there might look like this:

> The project coordinator has arranged for you to be available at the agency two afternoons a week from 3-5:00 p.m. You have an assortment of books and magazines on topics of interest to teenagers, games (for-fun board games as well as educational word and computation games), a sampler of forms and applications commonly encountered in daily life, some high interest reading materials for low-level readers, perhaps some writing practice and calligraphy books, some of the pre-GED and GED preparation books, and maybe even a portable computer.
>
> You and the coordinator have negotiated with the agency for an appropriate space for you to set up your drop-in "center" and you quickly become established there. At first you feel a bit awkward--you've been introduced to the staff, but people aren't exactly sure what you'll be doing because it's hard to predict. From the kids you get wide-ranging responses, from total avoidance to confrontational questions about what you're doing there. Gradually you draw them into conversation, maybe play a game, learn a little something about their personal interests and show them some of the materials you have that seem to fit with their interests. When kids want to know why you're there, you explain that you're a resource and ask them to spread the word so other kids will know.
>
> Counselors begin to refer youth to you with specific questions ("I need help on this job application"; "Did they figure this pay check right?"). They also encourage others to stop by (one has a fear of testing; another wants some kind of educational training, but isn't sure what the options are; still others aren't sure they want anything but maybe . . .).
>
> As a drop-in helper you get to know a few street youth well--they start to come in to hang out with you on a regular basis. Others you seldom see twice. You sometimes have the opportunity to work in a concentrated way with one person or a small group. On other occasions you find yourself spread very thin, jumping from one interest or question to another. You also find that you have occasion to refer young people to other types of tutoring or training.
>
> As a drop-in helper you are flexible and resourceful, since you aren't necessarily able to plan in advance for your next drop-in session. Things are often very unpredictable. They are also highly stimulating.

Topical Workshops

The topical workshop format grew out of the need to find ways to attract street youth who would be reluctant to express an interest in improving their basic skills or even in participating in structured learning. The drop-in format mentioned above is one way of making contact with such youth, but some, perhaps many, will never approach that type of setting either.

The topical workshop format presents information or activities known to be of interest to street youth. This format is perhaps the least threatening to the participants, since the presentation is made to a group and there is no obligation to attend or to participate actively once there.

One session is an achievement. This format also fills a need for training at agencies where youth spend a limited time period, either because the program limits their participation to a specific time period (Harry's Mother, for example, where 2 weeks is the maximum), or because the youth themselves drop in and then aren't seen again for months at a time.

The workshop format lends itself well to creating self-contained educational experiences. That is, activities can be designed that can be completed in one session. Youth can learn something, accomplish something during that one session and leave having had one small success. This is extremely important when working with reluctant learners. That small success can be the beginning of their re-engagement with learning.

If youth and volunteers are interested in exploring a topic in greater depth, topical workshops may also be an ongoing activity. For example, during the pilot phase of Takin' It to the Streets, weekly creative writing workshops were popular. Youth knew they could come every Tuesday and write; they also knew they could come only one time and still get something out of it.

Do you have a special interest? The workshop format is particularly well suited to volunteers who have some special expertise they want to share. The volunteer takes on the role of workshop leader, planning and presenting the workshop. However, he/she can expect to work closely with the project coordinator in designing the workshop and related exercises or activities. (Module Five below includes guidelines for designing topical workshops.)

The critical factor here is that the workshop be a topic known to interest the potential audience and that the accompanying exercises/activities incorporate functional uses of basic skills. In this way the workshop provides not only information but also practical application of that information.

As a topical workshop presenter you have a particular interest--a topic you know something about and would feel comfortable discussing in detail with a group of kids. This may be something you've developed as a hobby or some expertise you've acquired while on the job. The topics may vary considerably, from how to eat well on a tight budget to knowing your legal rights.

Street youth have a wide variety of interests (see Focus Question 1 above in this Module). Topics may relate to job-search techniques, recreational pursuits, health, or civic concerns, for example. A very strong interest of street youth recently surveyed in Portland was the need to educate the public about street youth and the reasons they're on the streets. This public education effort might be accomplished through publishing the creative writing of these youth, using investigative journalism, or creating street theater vignettes to entertain and educate. Working with street youth on a public service project is another way of helping the public image of these young people, while strengthening basic skills.

The most appropriate format for your workshop topic may be one session only, or it may lend itself to a series of sessions. (This may depend on the interest expressed by the youth at the agency.) If you create a one-session workshop, you will probably present it several times during the six or more months that you commit to volunteering with this project. The agency and the project coordinator will assist you by publicizing the workshop and encouraging kids to attend. You will meet with the coordinator to work out the details of the presentation and ways to build in real-life uses of basic skills related to your topic.

As a workshop presenter you will have the opportunity to share your expertise with youth who are interested in the topic. You may see these young people only once, or you may work with them over a long period. Even if you only see them once, you'll have the opportunity of helping them have a positive experience with learning.

Consider yourself as a workshop presenter. The possibilities for topics are limitless. Here is an example, using the topic of creative writing:

> You like to write and you know something about it. The coordinator has told you that the staff at one agency believe the youth there are really interested in writing--poetry, essays, letters and notes. You all have agreed to set up a weekly creative writing workshop. The agency agrees to help publicize the workshops.
>
> You meet with the coordinator to discuss ways to structure the writing exercises, so that they allow the youth to express themselves freely. During the first few sessions in the series, you limit your critiques and suggestions of style, spelling, or syntax so that you don't discourage participation. The focus is on self-expression.
>
> In talking with the staff you realize that it is important to structure the workshops so that the youth will be working toward a product--perhaps a small publication of their essays and poetry. You try this idea out on the kids who come and they like it. So, at each session you try to have them complete something for possible inclusion in their book. This way, even if kids don't come regularly, or only come once, they will have contributed something and will be able to get the satisfaction of having their pieces published.
>
> Sometimes you ask them to pick their own topics; other times you ask that everyone focus on the same thing, such as "My Ideal Job" or "What the City of Portland Needs" or "My Favorite Food." Much of what they write is very personal and often very difficult to read. You are very careful about sharing with others what they let you read. You are also careful to interject fun, whimsical topics or exercises from time to time so that they can use writing for entertainment as well as self-expression.

You sometimes focus on a particular genre: for example, poetry (free verse, Haiku, sonnets, etc.), persuasive writing, satire, advertisements, complaints. To do this you bring in a few examples for the particular workshop session. You have collected "choice" Letters to the Editor from the local paper and you bring those in to inspire kids to write their own.

As you get to know the young people who attend and they start to trust you a bit, you begin to give some guidelines for what they are writing, based on the types of strengths and weaknesses you see in their writing. You make your comments very relevant to their interests and purposes for writing, but you are careful not to publicly criticize any individual.

Attendance at your workshops is quite variable, but over time you develop a group or "regulars." Your workshops are fun and challenging--and they provide an outlet for self-expression in a safe forum. And, gradually the participants learn something about writing and gain some confidence in themselves as well.

MODULE THREE

Focus Question 3

Outcome

FOCUS QUESTION 3: What are formats for basic skills training that might be used in different agencies and which is best for me?

Outcome: A list of the pro's and con's of each format for you and a chart showing the format(s) you prefer.

Instructions: Think back about what you've learned about the four formats suggested here for basic skills training for street youth.

1. What are some of the pro's and con's of each format for you as a volunteer?

Pro's	Con's

2. Think about the pro's and con's you've identified for each of the training formats. From that list you may already have a pretty good idea of the format that appeals to you most. It will also be helpful to review your reasons for wanting to tutor and your expectations for the tutoring experience (see Module One).

   Now, to confirm or clarify your impressions about which format to choose, walk yourself through the following exercise.

   On the next page you will find a chart, with "Factors to Consider" on the left and "Training Formats" on the right. The x's in the columns indicate when a factor pertains to a particular training format. Ask yourself the questions below and for each one circle your preference on the chart each time it appears in one of the four Training Format columns. When you have finished, you should have a graphic picture of the format (or formats) you prefer.

   1) Is it important to me to have the potential to establish a personal, on-going relationship with the young person(s) I tutor, or do I prefer occasional or one-time contact?

   2) In terms of my time, do I prefer frequent meetings for which the need for outside preparation time is moderate to low, or would I like to meet less frequently with the youth, but spend considerably more time preparing for those meetings?

   3) Do I want to work with only one individual or do I prefer to have contact with a number of youth over the course of my tutoring commitment?

   4) Do I have a strong preference regarding the type of kids I work with? For example, to work only with a certain age group; only with girls (or boys); only with kids who have been physically abused; etc.

   5) Do I have some expertise in a particular topic that I would enjoy sharing with street kids?

   6) Which learning situation do I feel most comfortable with: individualized, collaborative, group?

   7) How comfortable am I with unpredictable situations? Do I enjoy the challenge of responding to several new situations on the spot?

Choosing a Basic Skills Training Format

Factors to Consider	Basic Skills Training Formats			
What do you prefer regarding:	1-on-1	Small Group	Drop-in Helping	Topical Workshops
1. Contact with kids:				
On-going over time	x	x		x (Limited time)
Occasional			x	
One time only			x	x
2. Time allocation:				
-Frequency of sessions:				
Regular, 2x/wk.	x	x	x	
Weekly/Monthly				x
-Amount of Preparation:				
Low (relatively)			x	
Medium	x	x		
High				x
3. Number of kids:				
Only one	x			
Several		x		
Varying number			x	x
4. Learner characteristics:				
Age (younger vs. older)	x	x		x
Sex (girls vs. boys)	x	x		x
Specific background (specify:)	x	x		x
5. Content expertise:				
Basic skills training	x	x	x	x
Specific topic expertise				x
6. Tutoring techniques:				
Individualized	x	(x)	x	
Collaborative		x	x	x
Group				x
7. Flexibility/tolerance of unpredictability:				
Low (relatively)	x			
Medium		x		x
High			x	

Now check this graphic picture against the overall impressions you found yourself forming as you were reading this module. Does it feel right? If not, think it through again, carefully questioning yourself about each category.

If you have any questions that this exercise has not addressed, feel free to take them up with the project coordinator.

MODULE FOUR

DETERMINING AN AGENCY SITE FOR YOUR WORK

Takin' It to the Streets provides a clear and simple procedure for you to follow as you confirm your placement, prepare for, and begin your tutoring. This module walks you through these organizational steps.

FOCUS QUESTION 1: How does the project coordinator match volunteers with youth-serving agencies?

Outcome: A list of issues to be explored with your contact at the youth-serving agency.

FOCUS QUESTION 2: How will I decide if the potential placement is right for me?

Outcome: A set of criteria by which you can judge the appropriateness of the site for you.

FOCUS QUESTION 3: How do I finalize my agency site and get started?

Outcome: A volunteering agreement, reviewed by the coordinator and shared with the agency.

MODULE FOUR

Focus Question 1

FOCUS QUESTION 1: How does the project coordinator match volunteers with youth-serving agencies?

Objective: To work with the coordinator to select a volunteering site that is appropriate for you.

Critical Points

- o Each volunteer completing training will have a placement meeting with the project coordinator.
- o You and the coordinator will match your interests, skills and availability with needs expressed by youth agencies throughout the metro area.
- o After the placement meeting, you will be responsible for initiating contact with the youth-serving agency that has been proposed for you.
- o You should call the coordinator to confirm that you have an agency appointment.

The Placement Meeting

The coordinator is in regular contact with youth-serving agencies participating in the project. He/she will be able to match your interests, times available, etc., with the needs for basic skills training that agencies have identified. While you are completing your training, the coordinator will be looking for a placement for you. When an apparent fit of volunteer and youth agency emerges, the coordinator will call you to set the placement meeting.

At this meeting the coordinator will discuss your interests and emerging plans for volunteering. This will be an opportunity for you to raise any questions that you still have, to clarify what your preferences are, and to establish the type of youth-serving agency that is most suited for your volunteer work.

As you have learned more about street youth and about basic skills tutoring in the course of the training, you may find that you want to add to or alter some of the information that you provided on your application. This meeting is a good opportunity to review and confirm your ideas.

Based on this information, the coordinator will recommend an agency for you to visit and give you the name and number of the agency contact person. It will be your responsibility to call the agency to set up an appointment for a site visit. Let the coordinator know when your appointment will take place.

MODULE FOUR

Focus Question 1

Outcome

FOCUS QUESTION 1: How does the project coordinator match volunteers with youth-serving agencies?

Outcome: A list of issues to be explored with your contact at the youth serving agency.

Instructions: You have become more familiar with street youth and with basic skills tutoring in the course of your training. You have learned about the kinds of agencies which serve youth. And, based on this information, you have selected the format of training you would like to undertake.

Think back now over all these new insights and ideas. Think of issues that stand out in your mind as necessary or important when you visualize yourself working with youth in an agency setting. These may be things about the kids themselves, about the agency, its staff support, or about the facility you would be working in.

List here five things that are important to you. Discuss them with the coordinator at the placement meeting.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

MODULE FOUR

Focus Question 2

FOCUS QUESTION 2: How will I decide if the potential placement is right for me?

Objective: To reach clarity, on the side of both the volunteer and the agency, that this placement will lead to valuable service for the agency's youth client population and a rewarding experience for the volunteer.

Critical Points

- You should have a specific agency staff contact.
- You should feel positive about working with the agency's youth clients.
- Staff should facilitate your first meetings with their clients.
- The physical space and equipment should enable you to do your work with the youth.
- Your expectations and those of the agency should be the same.
- Both you and the agency will have the opportunity to decide if this placement is appropriate.

Visiting the Agency

When you have your appointment with the prospective agency, you will want to make the most of this opportunity to clarify, in your own mind and in the eyes of the agency staff, how well you can work in this setting and with these youth. Here are some things to consider.

Visit at a time when you would be working there. It may help to get a picture of what working there would be like if you arrange to meet at the same time of day as you would be there as a volunteer. The number and types of youth present varies during the day. For example, if you plan to work at a time that the staff is busy, try to visit at a busy time to see how a larger number of youth present would enhance or detract from your work.

Establish a specific staff contact. While your appointment may be with the agency youth services director or volunteer coordinator, you should identify and meet the person who will be your designated contact. In most cases this will be a youth counselor. This person should be available to offer you advice and information on occasion and, after several sessions, work with you to evaluate how youth are responding to your efforts.

All youth agency staff are overworked and must try to devote as much time as possible to direct contact with clients. Don't expect to have a great deal of attention from your contact person, but be sure you have clearly established when and for what reasons you should go to her/him. (See Module Six for guidelines about your ongoing contact with agency staff.)

Get to know the youth clientele. You will need to come away with some self-assessment of how well you can work with the agency's street youth clients. Ask your contact person to describe what the youth do at the agency, how available for your activities they might be, and how the staff will introduce your work to them. If there are youth at the agency and it seems appropriate to the staff member, you may want to meet some youth and talk with them.

Ask about participation. You should also explore with the staff member how the agency plans to put you in touch with interested youth or announce your service and encourage participation. This may vary from their initiative to yours, depending on the nature of the agency, the sorts of services you want to provide, and personal preferences. The exact ways in which this will happen can be set out later, in the agreement you will be drawing up, but just how the agency sees it working should be discussed at this juncture.

Think also about how you can take an active role in publicizing your services. Is there a bulletin board for a poster? Would training taking place in an open-space area perhaps attract other youth who are just hanging out?

Examine the facilities. Youth serving agencies often have to make do with limited space and far less than ideal equipment and conditions. Don't expect to have a perfect situation for your training work, but do think about what your minimum needs are. Do you need a desk, a seating space, a private area away from public eye and ear? Do you need to be able to leave materials or other things for the youth you are working with and how could you assure they got them? Is there a place to leave a message for one of your learners, if needed?

Ask about rules and regulations. It is important for you to know about any specific rules and regulations the agency has established regarding acceptable behavior and use of facilities. Do they allow smoking in certain areas only? Are youth admitted only during specific hours? Are there designated areas for eating or sleeping? Is there a special procedure staff follow in case of emergency? Agency staff should include these rules in their orientation for you. If they don't, however, you should be sure to ask about them.

Confidentiality. One topic that you and your contact person should discuss is the confidentiality of all information having to do with the youth you are going to be working with. Much of the material that the agencies have on youth is confidential and it is important that we all carefully observe the clients' personal and legal rights. Most of the youth you will be working with are legally minors; they may be involved with or be wards of the courts.

Trustful relationships that agency staff have built up with the youth are tenuous and it is important that all adults they come into contact with are aware of the importance of maintaining these levels of trust.

Clarify expectations. After this meeting both you and the agency staff will independently decide if this is a good match. Be sure that your understanding of what is expected of you is the same as the agency's. You may want to review some of the main points of the conversation at the close of the interview, just to be sure you're clear on what's been said.

It is on the basis of this conversation that a volunteer agreement will be drawn up, if both volunteer and agency decide it's a "go." If everything has been said now, it will avoid hurdles later.

Deciding on a match. You should have let the project coordinator know when your visit to the agency was scheduled. After the visit you will be responsible for calling the coordinator to share your reaction. She/he will then phone your contact person to get their opinion on the match with you.

If it's a good match, the coordinator will review the planned work and ask you to fill out the volunteer agreement (see Focus Question 3). If you or the agency feels this is not a good placement, the coordinator will discuss the reasons why with you and suggest another potential placement. Simply follow the above steps once again.

MODULE FOUR

Focus Question 2

Outcome

FOCUS QUESTION 2: How will I decide if the potential placement is right for me?

Outcome: A set of criteria by which you can judge the appropriateness of the site for you.

Instructions: As you think about the information and insights you have gained in your agency visit, think about how you would work there. Now you have a concrete setting and real staff and youth to consider as you visualize.

For each of the following issues, state your personal needs and how the agency does or does not meet these criteria. If you identify areas in which your minimum needs appear not to be met, try to think how they might be.

These areas of discrepancy and agreement should be discussed with the coordinator.

1. Fact: The agency offered this staff support:

Criterion: I need this staff support:

Match: Is staff support satisfactory? __Yes __No

If no, I need:

2. Fact: The youth at this agency are:

Criterion: The youth I think I can work with are:

Match: Can I serve the youth in this agency?
___Yes ___No

If no, I need:

3. Fact: Referral and outreach assistance offered to contact the youth was:

Criterion: I need this support in reaching out to and meeting youth:

Match: Will I be able to contact the youth at this agency? ___Yes ___No

If no, I need:

4. Fact: The equipment and space offered were:

Criterion: To deliver services I need this equipment and space:

Match: Do I have what I need, or can I get what I need, to work in this setting?
___Yes ___No

If no, I need:

MODULE FOUR

Focus Question 3

FOCUS QUESTION 3: How do I finalize my agency site and get started?

Objective: To specify the terms of your volunteer work in a volunteer agreement, so that you, the project coordinator, and the agency staff have a shared, clear understanding of each other's responsibilities and roles for the basic skills training you are undertaking.

Critical Points

- Each volunteer will prepare a volunteer agreement which describes how the volunteer, the agency contact, and the coordinator will work together.
- The agreement will specify the responsibilities of the volunteer.
- The agreement will specify the support services to be provided by the contact person and the agency.
- The agreement will specify the support services to be provided by the project coordinator.
- The coordinator will distribute copies of the agreement to you and the agency, after all have signed the agreement.

Your Volunteer Agreement

Volunteer situations, even more than other work commitments, function best when the terms are clearly specified. Particularly in working with street youth it is important to be able to make clear statements and describe the limits of what you can and can't commit to, since many youth have a long history of disappointments at the hands of adults.

You are part of a team. This program of basic skills training for street youth relies on a team approach, enabling the volunteer to draw on support from the staff of the site agency, as well as the project coordinator. The youth-serving agency will provide you not only with a place to work, but some assistance in starting to work with street youth and, should the need arise, advice as you proceed. The coordinator is your resource for questions about basic skills training materials or methods, diagnostic assistance, and general advice about the Takin' It to the Streets program.

While the time and attention of agency staff will be highly limited, it will be clearly defined in the agreement you work out. The program coordinator is prepared to assist you at any time and you should feel free to contact him/her whenever you have questions, concerns or news to share. The monthly trainers' meeting will also offer a forum for meeting with the coordinator and other volunteers. At these meetings trainers will be able to share experiences and insights and receive further training on topics of the volunteers' own choosing.

Developing the agreement. You will want to share the proposal terms of your volunteer agreement with the project coordinator. This may be accomplished in a phone call or, if you have questions or want assistance, in a meeting. After the coordinator has reviewed the agreement, take it to the agency--perhaps when you go for your first session--and ask your staff contact to look it over. You, the coordinator, and the agency will all keep a copy.

After you've discussed the agreement with the project coordinator, call the agency for a date to start. Your contact person should meet with you this first session, introducing you to other staff, getting you set up with space or equipment, and introducing you to your learner(s).

There may be parts of the agreement that cannot be answered until you go for your first session at the agency, since some matters may not have been fully discussed in the initial visit. These can easily be settled with your contact person when you go to start. They should be few and minor matters, since the initial visit should have covered all the topics outlined in Focus Question 1.

When you and your agency contact have signed the agreement, send it to the coordinator, who will sign it and make copies for you and the agency.

MODULE FOUR

Focus Question 3

Outcome

FOCUS QUESTION 3: How do I finalize my agency site and get started?

Outcome: A volunteering agreement, reviewed by the coordinator and shared with the agency.

Instructions: You are provided here with a practice copy of the volunteer agreement for you to use in working out your answers to the questions. When you are placed with an agency, you will have a formal copy to be completed, signed by you, and turned in to the project coordinator. The coordinator will review and distribute copies to you and to the agency.

Note that the agreement is in three sections: volunteer responsibilities, agency responsibilities, and project coordinator responsibilities. Thus, it is an agreement which represents the team-work approach of the program.

To complete the agreement, do the following:

1. Fill in the section that describes your commitments for volunteering.
2. Complete the section on agency support as fully as you can, using your notes from the agency visit.
3. Call the project coordinator to discuss any remaining questions in the first two sections and to finish up the third section, on coordinator support.
4. Take the agreement to your first session at the agency. Ask your contact person to review it. If there are any issues still not fully resolved about agency support, you can work them out at this point.
5. Sign and send the agreement to the coordinator. You and the agency will receive copies in return, once the coordinator has reviewed the agreement.

TAKIN' IT TO THE STREETS

VOLUNTEER AGREEMENT

I. SERVICES TO BE PROVIDED BY THE VOLUNTEER

The volunteer agrees to:

(1) provide basic skills training for a minimum of six months according to the terms below;
(2) respect the confidentiality of information about the youth;
(3) respect the rules and regulations of the host agency;
(4) maintain a log of contacts and training sessions provided and share it regularly with the agency and the coordinator; and,
(5) participate in monthly volunteer meetings.

Format:
_____ One-on-one tutoring
_____ Small group tutoring
_____ Drop-in basic skills helping
_____ Workshop on ______________________________

Time commitment: ________________ hours per week

At ____________ on ______________________
(time) (days of week)

Youth to be served:

Name(s) (if known): ______________________________

Number: ____________________

Special characteristics: ______________________________

____

Location of training, if other than the agency: ______________________________

____

II. SUPPORT PROVIDED BY THE AGENCY

The agency will support the basic skills training by:

(1) providing facilities, and
(2) providing staff to:
  (a) recruit/select youth to participate;
  (b) introduce the volunteer and the youth;
  (c) provide information on the youth's basic skills and educational achievement and goals, as available;
  (d) monitor the youth's responses to training; and,
  (e) collaborate in evaluating the training.

Facilities: Space: ______________________________

Equipment: ______________________________

____

Learner recruitment/publicity: ______________________________

____

Initial introductions to youth: ______________________________

____

Monitoring of youth's responses to tutoring: ______________________________

____

Contact person's time:

Initial meetings: ______________________________

Monitoring youth's responses (part of case management): ______________________________

____

Circumstances for additional contact: ______________________________

____

Evaluation after ________ sessions: ______________________________

____

III. SUPPORT PROVIDED BY THE PROJECT COORDINATOR

The coordinator will:

(1) facilitate volunteer placement;
(2) monitor the basic skills training via "check in" calls (at least two the first month and one per month thereafter) to volunteer and to agency;
(3) conduct monthly trainer group meetings;
(4) provide technical assistance with literacy issues and diagnosis;
(5) provide limited materials as individually agreed; and,
(6) evaluate the training.

Monthly trainer group meetings, taking place at:

Location: ____________________

Time: ____________________

Technical assistance with literacy issues: ____________________

____

____

Materials: ____________________

____

____

Diagnostic expertise: ____________________

____

____

* * * * * * * * * *

The volunteer understands that this agreement in no way establishes an employee/employer relationship between the volunteer and NWREL nor between the volunteer and the social service agency where he/she is placed. The volunteer further understands that neither NWREL nor the social service agency at which he/she volunteers is able to provide any primary insurance coverage. The volunteer accepts the conditions of volunteer work at his/her own risk.

SIGNED ____________________ ____________
Volunteer Date

MODULE FIVE

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE: BASIC SKILLS TRAINING TECHNIQUES

Everything in this volunteer training manual up to this point has been preparing you to work with street youth at the social service agencies where they can be reached. This module focuses on the actual basic skills training you'll be providing the youth. First we walk through the things you'll want to accomplish during your first session with your learner(s). Next we discuss what you'll need to do to prepare for subsequent training sessions. Then we focus on special strategies for planning topical workshops or drop-in helping. And finally we describe guidelines for evaluating the training you provide.

FOCUS QUESTION 1: How should I prepare for my first session with the youth?

Outcome: A plan for the first contact with your learner(s).

FOCUS QUESTION 2: What should I consider in planning subsequent training sessions?

Outcome: A set of planning strategies that will help you respond to your learners' needs and interests and provide meaningful, useful and attractive basic skills training.

FOCUS QUESTION 3: What special planning strategies will I need to be able to present a topical workshop or set up drop-in helping at an agency?

Outcome: Specific strategies necessary for planning workshops and drop-in helping.

FOCUS QUESTION 4: How do I evaluate my work with these youth?

Outcome: A set of guidelines to follow as you review the results of your sessions.

MODULE FIVE

Focus Question 1

FOCUS QUESTION 1: How should I prepare for my first session with the youth?

Objective: To walk through the activities you hope to accomplish during your first session with your learner(s).

Critical Points

- In the first session you'll begin to get acquainted. You'll want to learn something about the youths, but will be sure to share something of yourself. If the topic is not too sensitive, you may learn about the youths' past experiences with school and training.
- You'll try to explore interests and possible goals, checking for the youths' expectations for this tutoring.
- You may try an informal assessment of literacy skills, but you won't "test."
- You'll have some concrete activity to accomplish--something relevant to street youth, do-able (achievable), and completable--so that the youth will leave this session with a positive experience.
- You may suggest an assignment for next time, but only if it seems appropriate.
- You'll negotiate with your learners and agree on when, where and how often to meet and you'll provide a card with that information and your name and a message phone number.
- Above all, you'll be sensitive to the learners' interests and needs. You'll be flexible. You won't push to accomplish any particular agenda, remembering your main goal: to help the youth become re-interested in learning.

Terms to Know

Open-ended question: A question which cannot be answered with a "yes" or "no." This technique is used to draw out the learner's thoughts, opinions and experiences and ensure that the tutor is not directing the outcome of the discussion by putting words into the learner's mouth.

Probing response: A phrase or question without content that encourages the learner to continue or expand on what he/she is saying. Probing responses do not give interpretation or direction to the conversation.

Paraphrasing: Re-stating what the learner has said. This communication technique helps the tutor clarify his/her understanding of the conversation and ensure the learner that the tutor is listening.

Interest inventory: A short list of open-ended questions or topics used to elicit information about an individual's interests.

Learning style: The way in which an individual learns best. There are thought to be many different learning styles. Four commonly identified styles are visual, auditory, tactile and kinesthetic.

What Do I Have to Offer?

Before you start, remember the most important thing you have to offer: a caring, committed adult who will be constant and consistent over time, who will listen to the youth and offer the type of basic skills training requested, based on the individual youth's interests and needs.

Trained youth service agency staff repeat over and over again how important it is for street youth to have a reliable, caring adult in their lives--whatever the service being provided. Your interest in volunteering for this project shows that you are that type of person. As you tutor, remember the responsibility that you are taking on and the importance of being there.

Getting Acquainted and Exploring Interests

Your first session with the youth will mainly be a getting acquainted visit. You should already know something about your learners, based on information from the counselor who referred them. But you will want to spend time sharing a little personal information, carefully opening up the channels of communication.

You will need to be patient and sensitive to your learners, following their cues regarding appropriate topics of conversation. If possible, you'll want to learn something about the learners' motivation for meeting with you. Do they have any specific goals in mind? What are their expectations for the tutoring? What do they want to accomplish? How do they expect you to proceed? Do they have any strong feelings about what they don't want the tutoring experience to be? But be careful not to turn this conversation into the "third degree."

Keys to communicating with street youth.[1] Needless to say, communication with adolescents is not always easy. In your volunteer work with street youth, it will be critical for you to be able to establish good rapport with the youth early on. In your first meeting, if you do not appear to be a person who is truly interested in what the youth wants and needs, you may not have a second session. As you have learned from Module One, street youth can be impatient as well as reluctant to trust adults. You'll need to show that you are genuinely interested in the youth as individuals.

The types of experiences street youth have had communicating with adults in the past require that you follow certain guidelines as you begin to establish communication with them. Keep these things in mind:

- **Treat the youth in a way that gives them a sense of control of the situation.**

---

[1] This section is adapted from "Communicating with High-Risk Youth," a volunteer training workshop by Judith C. McGavin, Coordinator of Volunteers for Janis Youth Programs, Inc., Runaway and Homeless Youth Programs. The workshop was sponsored by the Tri-County Youth Services Consortium in Portland, Oregon, August 18, 1987.

- **Be aware of the physical setting.** Create a non-threatening environment. For example, leave the door slightly ajar so that the youth feel able to leave at any time.
- **Be careful not to ask searching questions and be sensitive to defensive reactions.** You don't need to know all about the youth. Always know why you are asking a question and make sure that it is for the benefit of the youth and the task you are working on.
- **Be extremely careful of confrontation.** It is not necessary to get "true" feelings out. Remember your own limitations as a person and as a volunteer tutor/trainer. You are not necessarily a counselor, nor do you have the training to be one. Focus as much as possible on why you are there and know when to refer a learner to someone else for other kinds of help.
- **Pick up cues from the youth**--notice body posture and hand movements, for example, and adjust your responses accordingly.
- **Use humor whenever possible.**

Communication techniques.[2] There are a number of communication skills and techniques that have proved helpful in establishing interpersonal relationships. Some of these techniques may be especially helpful in communicating with street youth.

A fundamental, underlying rule of thumb is *"Be a good listener."* Here are several pointers that can help you listen well:

1. Establish *contact* through looking at the helpee when she/he talks.
2. Maintain a *natural relaxed posture* which indicates your interest.
3. Use *natural gestures* which communicate your intended messages.
4. Use *verbal statements* which relate to her/his statements without interruptions, questions, or new topics (Brammer 1973).

In your conversations with your learner, if something isn't clear admit that you don't understand. Ask the learner to either repeat what wasn't clear or give you an example of what she/he means. Try paraphrasing (see below) as a way to clarify. Also, when you ask questions, be sure to ask open-ended questions, which cannot be answered simply with a "yes" or "no." These are easy ways to be sure that you are focusing on what the learner is saying and not imposing your own interpretation or view on the conversation.

---

[2] This section is also adapted from Judith C. McGavin's August 18, 1987, workshop.

Open-ended questioning is a technique commonly used in interviewing and counseling. The counseling term, "an open invitation to talk" (Ivey, 1971:151), is very appropriate for what you want to accomplish in your first meeting (as well as subsequent sessions) with your learner. You want to get to know the youth by hearing her/his reasons for being there. You do not want to lead the discussion, whether consciously or unconsciously, in the direction of shaping the tutoring to meet your needs and expectations. You are there to serve the learner and, especially at first, that means finding out what he/she wants from the interaction and how best to go about it.

Here are examples of an open-ended and a closed question:

Open: Could you tell me a little about your experiences with school?

Closed: So, you left school in 9th grade?

Clearly the closed question will bring a "yes/no" response, whereas the open question requires something more.

Another technique that can facilitate communication is using *probing responses*. These are phrases or questions that encourage the learner to continue or expand on what she/he is saying. These responses have no content in them--you don't lead the discussion or give any particular interpretation or direction by using these probes. These are sometimes graphically called "minimal encourages to talk":

> The word "minimal" refers both to how much the interviewer says, which can be very little, and to the amount of direction or intervention he imposes on the content and flow of the interview.
>
> This technique presupposes that the interviewer has tuned in to what the client is discussing. Minimal encourages to talk should follow directly from what the interviewee has just said. When used correctly, the interviewee, although maintaining control of the interview in that he is talking about what he wants to discuss, is forced to elaborate, explain, and to take a more in-depth look... (Ivey, 1971:152-153).

Some examples of good probing responses--minimal encourages to talk--are:

1. "Oh?" "So?" "Then?" "And?"
2. The repetition of one or two key words.
3. "Tell me more."
4. "How did you feel about that?"
5. "Give me an example."
6. "What does that mean to you?"
7. "Mm-hmmm." (Ivey, 1971:152-153).

Paraphrasing is another technique to help keep the communication flowing and make sure that you understand what's really being said. It is also useful in establishing rapport, because the learner will know that you have really been listening and are trying to understand. Here are some examples:

Learner: I don't know what I want to do. There are at least a dozen different things I'm interested in.

Tutor: You seem to have a lot of interests, and you find it hard to choose one.

Learner: School put me to sleep. The teachers just gave us busy work all the time.

Tutor: Sounds like you found school boring.

Exploring interests and goals. Some of the youth who will work with this project will have definite ideas about what they need or want to accomplish with your help. Others may have only the feeling that they need to improve their basic skills. Some may not identify basic skills as a problem, but may be interested in a particular task involving reading (for example, reading a map of the city) or a special topic (job search). And still others may have only a vague sense that they need to do something and their counselor has managed to steer them in your direction.

As noted, if possible during your first session with your learner, you'll want to find out what brought her/him to you and what she/he hopes to gain from meeting with you. You'll also want to learn more about her/his interests in general so that you'll be able to build on them as you tutor, bringing in materials that relate to her/his special interests. You'll also want to let the learner know that you are there to work with her/him on her/his goals and interests--that you do not have any specific agenda to impose.

In addition to skillful (but natural) conversation, one way to explore interests is through an *interest inventory*. An interest inventory is a short list of questions or topics to elicit information that will be helpful in understanding an individual's reasons for wanting to study basic skills and also helpful in selecting materials for use in instruction. There are several interest inventories for use with adults who are studying literacy. The following "Checklist of Reasons for Reading" is an example (Hakanson, n.d.).

A CHECKLIST OF REASONS FOR READING

Listed below are some of the reasons that an adult may have for developing and/or improving his/her reading ability. Go over this list with your client to better define his/her goals.

1. ____ read newspapers
2. ____ read books
3. ____ read magazines
4. ____ vote intelligently
5. ____ read to his/her children
6. ____ read one complete book
7. ____ write letters
8. ____ fill out an employment application
9. ____ learn about job interviews
10. ____ get a better job
11. ____ pass the driver's test
12. ____ work toward GED preparation classes
13. ____ learn to read recipes
14. ____ read the want ads
15. ____ read grocery ads
16. ____ shop wisely
17. ____ read directions on packages and household incidentals
18. ____ find out about community services
19. ____ help with school work
20. ____ improve spelling skills
21. ____ locate numbers in the white and yellow pages of the telephone directory
22. ____ read menus
23. ____ read maps--city, highway, etc.
24. ____ fill out tax forms
25. ____ read insurance forms
26. ____ learn a hobby
27. ____ fill out a credit application
28. ____ learn how to read pattern instructions
29. ____ tell time
30. ____ make a budget
31. ____ interpret monthly bills, etc.
32. ____ read directions on prescriptions
33. ____ read bus schedules
34. ____ learn more about Social Security
35. ____ read and write personal checks
36. ____ learn things to do when renting an apartment or house
37. ____ read and understand leases
38. ____ read and understand purchase contracts
39. ____ learn the "Essential Vocabulary" words
40. ____ learn how to use the library
41. ____ read and understand labels that caution against specific danger
42. ____ read and interpret consumer vocabulary

43. ____ read and use information to solve problems
44. ____ identifying information found in newspapers

Others:

45. ____ ____
46. ____ ____

Adapted from *Blueprint for tutoring adult readers*, developed under the direction of Edward E. Hakanson, Drake University, Des Moines, Iowa.

Clearly, you and the youth could add some items to this list which would be even more appropriate for street youth. We do not advocate using this list--or even others of your own devising--in your first session unless it is very clear that you are dealing with youth who are not hesitant about their interest in or need to improve their basic skills. Sitting down with reluctant learners and putting them through such a list is too similar to a structured school activity. So, use extreme caution. We include the list here because it may be helpful to you in thinking about focusing the conversation with your learners.

Assessment of Skills

To test or not to test? That is the question with any hesitant learner. Many volunteer literacy programs recognize the need to use brief, informal ways to discover the skill levels of their new learners. They understand that most adult literacy or basic skills students have long been insecure about their skills, and they often have unpleasant memories of school and test-taking. Now that they have finally decided to do something about their situation, immediately having to take a test can be so discouraging or even frightening that they may give up again before they start studying.

Street youth with low basic skills can be expected to respond similarly to adults in that position. In fact, they are likely to have had far fewer positive life experiences, and they are struggling with normal adolescent issues of self-identity, magnified because of their experiences on the streets. Their self-esteem, as you have seen in Module One, is very fragile. Thus, there is even more reason to approach any kind of formal assessment (testing) of them with extreme caution. If, in addition, they are not sure they really want or need to work on improving their basic skills, then the initial assessment situation becomes even more delicate.

So, how will you know what their skills are and what level of materials to use? The youth and/or their counselors may have some information for you about this. And it may turn out to be fairly accurate. However, you must be careful not to make assumptions based on what the learner(s) or counselors have said. Last grade completed, as you know, is not necessarily a good indicator of skill level. Neither is reading grade level as indicated by a test score. Demonstrated skill level depends on so many factors, including:

- the nature of the reading/writing material (for example, a dry passage from a boring history text vs. a paragraph from a rock star magazine);
- the context of its use (a math test of addition vs. figuring a bill at a fast food place);
- degree of familiarity or experience with the material (a story on street life vs. one of life on a ranch).

Some youth may inflate what they can do, as a way of not showing vulnerability. Others may underestimate themselves because of their low self-esteem.

Wide variation in skill levels.[3] As you learned in Module Two, out-of-school youth on the streets may exhibit wide variations in basic skill levels. While some are sufficiently skilled (and interested) to create essays and poems of the quality of those reprinted in Module One, others dropped out of or disengaged from school before acquiring literacy skills beyond basic decoding and reproduction. Those whose lives demonstrate remarkable skill in personal self-expression through literacy may lack test-taking skills or freeze up in a test-like situation. We have met youth who did not attend school regularly after age nine, having left school before their educations became predominantly literacy-based. Some youth have chosen to read and even to write actively since leaving school. Others were not engaged in literacy in any meaningful way even during their schooling years. Thus, the population of out-of-school youth has a wide range of literacy achievement. Curricula of programs designed for street youth must be broad enough to encompass near-beginners, marginal readers and writers, and semi-skilled readers and writers with specific functional deficits.

When thinking about the potential range of literacy skill achievement among the youth you will encounter, consider:

- Statistics based on last testing in school indicate that 20 to 30% of out-of-school youth cannot read at the eighth grade level, compared with approximately 10% of the youth population as a whole.
- Reading skill level cannot be accurately estimated from grade in school that was completed. The disengagement from learning may have come long before the act of dropping out, or, alternatively, youth may have continued to use and improve their literacy skills after leaving school.
- Youth may have left school as early as grade four, i.e., before they had much experience using reading and writing as learning tools.
- Very few out-of-school youth lack all functional literacy skills. Even if they do not read and write well themselves, they are familiar with various functions for reading an writing and have developed strategies for accomplishing required literacy tasks, by themselves or with others.
- A youth's skill in prose, documentary and quantitative literacy may not be at equivalent levels and the three types may be valued very differently by the youth.
- Achievement in reading and writing may not be symmetric.

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[3] This section is excerpted and adapted from Nancy Faires Conklin and Janise Hurtig, *Making the connection: A report for literacy volunteers working with out-of-school youth*, (p.70). Portland, OR: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 1986.

- Youth who left school and those who have not found employment are more likely to have low skills, but failure in school is not a reliable skill-level indicator.

- Lower skilled youth may have already been rejected by pre-employment training or degree-completion programs for which they were tested and did not qualify.

Informal assessment. What you know about the youth's reasons for meeting with you will help you determine how and when to assess his/her skills. If the learner has a very focused goal--for example, reading the want ads to get a job, then you can legitimately use a want ad to begin to see what skills he/she has. You can do what some have called a finger assessment: As your learner reads aloud, behind your back you keep track of the number of errors on your fingers--in other words, a very rough initial assessment. If your learner has difficulty with the ad, you can use this same material to begin to tutor, working on abbreviations as sight words. Be sure to build on what the learner already knows about the ad. For example, draw him/her into conversation about the use of ads and get him/her to talk about what ads must include to be effective. Then build on that to identify words and abbreviations in the ad.

If, on the other hand, your learner has not identified any goals or is reluctant to talk about specific skills, you may put off even an informal check until the next session. If you've been successful at identifying some interests and you have any relevant materials with you or available on site, you could begin with them, checking both for interest and skills by drawing the learner into a discussion of the materials.

The key regarding assessment during this first session is to tread softly. Contrary to what you may feel, you do not have to come away knowing a lot about your learner's skills. If you succeed in establishing some rapport and carrying on a relatively comfortable conversation and have created an interest in meeting again, you will have accomplished more than enough in the first session.

A Do-able Activity

If possible, you will want to have some activity to focus on during your first session, something non-threatening, yet interesting enough that youth will want to do it. It should be something relevant to their lives, something that can be completed during this session, something failure-proof.

One activity which might catch a youth's interest and which would also give you some useful information for planning subsequent sessions is the *learning styles inventory* on the next page (Lerche, 1985).

Again, depending on what you have found out about your learner's skills, you may either discuss this with the learner or have him/her fill it out. If the person is not too reluctant, you might start by letting him/her try it, only working with the learner if and when it becomes apparent that help is needed. However, be sure that you are careful as you step in, so that you are not indicating any judgment on your part regarding the youth's

The Best Ways to Learn: A Learning Styles Inventory

What are the best ways for you to learn something? The list below tells some ways a person can learn. Read each thing in the list, and decide if you like to learn that way. Put a checkmark under "A Lot" if you really like to learn new things that way. Put a checkmark under "Some" if it would be OK to learn new things that way. Put a checkmark under "Not at All" if you don't like to learn that way.

A Lot	Some	Not at All	
____	____	____	working with my hands
____	____	____	learning in a group
____	____	____	listening to someone explain something
____	____	____	reading by myself
____	____	____	learning from TV programs
____	____	____	seeing something for myself rather than being told about it
____	____	____	using a computer to learn
____	____	____	seeing films or videotapes
____	____	____	listening to a speech
____	____	____	listening and taking notes
____	____	____	doing worksheets
____	____	____	having someone give me examples
____	____	____	having someone show me how to do something
____	____	____	doing something over and over until I get it
____	____	____	working with another student
____	____	____	doing homework
____	____	____	explaining something to someone who doesn't know it
____	____	____	asking questions
____	____	____	listening to a teacher lecturing
____	____	____	learning under pressure when there is a deadline
____	____	____	memorizing
____	____	____	learning on my own--by myself

Renee S. Lerche, *Effective adult literacy programs: A practitioner's guide*. New York: Cambridge Book Company, 1985, pp. 69-70.

skills or abilities. As Module One illustrated, too often youth are expecting to be judged as inadequate and will even assume that interpretation when you least intend it.

If you use the learning styles inventory, you will probably want to explain why it is useful. You can discuss the fact that differences exist among people regarding the ways they are most comfortable learning. For a long time (and even today in many schools) this was not considered in teaching. In fact, it is likely that in many cases students drop out in part because they do not learn well with the method or style imposed by the teacher. Finding out how your learner thinks she/he learns best can be very helpful for both you and the learner as you work together.

Briefly, there are many different ways to learn. A number of different descriptions have been created to categorize different types of learners. The following lists four types of learners (Hermanson & Brehm 1987):

VISUAL LEARNERS

Learn by seeing and by watching demonstrations.

Conjure up the image of a form by seeing it in their "mind's eye."

Often have vivid imaginations.

Often stare; they need something to watch.

Are often quiet and don't talk at length.

Become impatient or drift away when extensive listening is required.

Prefer the visual arts and media.

Learning reading through word recognition is useful to visual learners.

AUDITORY LEARNERS

Are excellent listeners.

Can reproduce symbols, letters or words by hearing them.

Enjoy dialogues, plays, dramas, dictations.

Often hum or talk to selves and others.

Favor music; can learn concepts by listening to tapes.

Can repeat or fulfill verbal instructions.

Learning reading through a phonics approach is useful to auditory learners.

TACTILE LEARNERS

Learning must involve the sense of touch.

Often take notes and like to write on the blackboard.

Like to do artwork.

Like to piece things together.

Are often found doodling.

Like to trace words and pictures.

Are often seen "fiddling" with something.

Tasks that require manipulation of something are successful with tactile learners, such as use of Cuisinaire rods, TPR, Bingo, etc.

KINESTHETIC LEARNERS

Learn by doing; direct involvement.

Often fidget and find reasons to move.

Are not as attentive to visual or auditory presentations; want to be *doing* something.

Try things out; touch, manipulate objects.

Gesture when speaking.

Are often poor listeners.

Respond to music by physical movement.

Total Physical Response activities are usually successful with kinesthetic learners.

Because more people tend to be visual learners (and because it has been easier to teach through media which can been seen), much of what goes on in school is geared toward visual learners. It is possible that more auditory, tactile and kinesthetic learners will be represented among the ranks of street youth in need of basic skills training because their discomfort with the way school was taught may be one of the reasons they left school early.

If your learner prefers to learn by listening, for example, he/she may well be an "auditory" learner. Such things as phonics, dialogs, plays, and rap music may be useful teaching tools for this person. If, on the other hand, your learner is extremely active and fidgety, activities which require movement (games and other creative activities that require a physical response) will be most appropriate.

This learning styles inventory is only one of many activities you might do during your first session. If you know in advance what types of interests or goals your learner has, you can come to the session prepared with some short activity that is related to those interests. This is really preferable, since the learner will feel that you have already begun to pay attention to his/her needs and some progress has been made. However, since many times you may not have that information in advance, we suggest this activity about learning styles as an alternative.

Provide structure for a positive experience. After all our cautions about reluctant learners and the need for learner-centered training, you may feel that you shouldn't or won't be able to impose an activity on your learner during this session. You'll have to read the situation. However, it can be a positive experience for the learner to leave having completed something, having done something concrete. Leaving puzzled about what she/he's doing with you and who's in charge could convince her/him not to return. The youth who attended workshops during the pilot phase of Takin' It to the Streets expected the tutors to take charge and let them know what to do. These youth may not want to be told what to do (they want to have some say in the activity, some negotiating power), but neither do they want to have to figure it out for themselves, like staring at a blank piece of paper.

What About "Homework"?

In general, you should not plan to "assign" any "homework" after the first session. In fact, you may never assign any. Be especially careful about using these terms. The less you make your tutoring/training like school, the more successful it is likely to be. We only raise this question here because some tutors are accustomed to expecting their learners to work on tasks in between sessions. There may also be some learners who will want extra things to do, once they become actively involved in the tutoring/training. This will be entirely individual. You will have to follow your learner's lead on this issue, being particularly sensitive to it early on. "When in doubt, don't" is a useful maxim in the case of "homework."

Negotiating Future Meetings

At the end of your first session you'll want to discuss the logistics of future meetings with your learner. First, of course, you'll want to make sure that the learner is interested in continuing to meet. You might talk briefly about some things you might work on or talk about next time, based on what you've learned about his/her interests and goals. If there are a number of things you could focus on, you'll want to elicit the learner's help in choosing which to do first. If the learner has some materials (a form to fill out, a magazine article, etc.) he/she wants to bring, be sure to encourage that. (This is the only form of "homework" that is okay to assign this first time).

You should try to arrange to meet twice a week for approximately 2 hours each time. You will already know from the agency what hours are most appropriate for you to use the facilities. You may also already know when your learner is available, but it is best for you to talk directly with him/her and make sure that you both agree on the best days and times of day to meet.

Be prepared to give your learner a card with your name and a message phone number on it so that he/she can reach you in case he/she can't meet at the agreed time. You can use the agency number. Write on the card the days and times you've decided to meet. Tell the learner that you understand that there may be days when he/she cannot come, but you do need him/her to let you know so you won't make the trip unnecessarily. Be prepared, however, for times when the learner doesn't show or call. Also, be sure that you understand how important it is for *you* to always be there at the agreed upon day and time. Remember that if you fail to show up or keep changing the appointments, the youth will blame her/himself and assume that you think she/he is "not worth it."

Above all, let your learner know that you're looking forward to working together. Agree on the next time to meet, and make sure it's within the next 4-5 days so that as little time as possible passes before you meet again.

Learner-Centered Tutoring

As you prepare for your first session with your learner, remember the main purpose of your volunteer work: to help the youth become re-interested in learning. To accomplish this goal, you will have to try to be very in tune with what the learner wants and needs--and, with what he/she enjoys. This tutoring/training process must be fun and interesting. It should be stimulating, yet not so challenging as to be discouraging.

We expect the training you provide to be attractive because:

- It is entirely learner-centered.
- The tutor:learner ratio is extremely low--the potential exists to establish a genuine, positive relationship with a caring adult.
- The approach builds on what the learner already knows, accentuating the positive and using individuals' interests as the impetus for learning.
- The approach is based on real-world applications of knowledge--a functional orientation to the teaching of basic skills.
- There are no tests, grades, or homework, nor is the learner obligated to continue to attend.
- The training takes place in a comfortable, non-threatening location at a convenient, negotiable time.

References

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MODULE FIVE

Focus Question 1

Outcome

FOCUS QUESTION 1: How should I prepare for my first session with the youth?

Outcome: A plan for the first contact with your learner(s).

Instructions: Review the critical points for things to be covered during your first session.

1. Make a list of the things you'll want to be sure to accomplish during your first meeting.

2. Now list five techniques you might use to explore your learner's interests and goals. (Be sure to include specific communication techniques.)

3. How might you use the results of the learning styles inventory to make your tutoring/training more appropriate?

4. Imagine that you already know your learner is interested in one of the following (choose one):

   - getting a driver's license
   - getting a job
   - studying for the GED
   - being able to read the bus schedule

   How might you structure the first activity you'll do with your learner? (Remember, this might also be a way to conduct an informal assessment.)

MODULE FIVE

Focus Question 2

FOCUS QUESTION 2: What should I consider in planning subsequent training sessions?

Objective: To compile a set of planning strategies to help you structure your tutoring/training.

Critical Points

- As you work together with your learners, you will need clear communication and agreement about the goals and objectives of the tutoring. The learners will set the goals; you will take the lead in defining the objectives to reach those goals.
- The central core of this basic skills training project is a functional approach--building on real-world interests and materials. You will find you *can* use and adapt materials taken from the youths' daily lives to make the acquisition of improved basic skills more relevant and enjoyable.
- Lesson planning--writing out objectives, steps necessary to achieve them, materials, procedures, and ways to evaluate the results--can be a very useful tool for planning subsequent sessions and monitoring progress.
- Activities you select for your tutoring must be challenging yet achievable to allow learners a sense of accomplishment and success.

Terms to Know

Goal: A major achievement which one plans or dreams of accomplishing.

Objective: One of several smaller, more immediate incremental steps necessary to reach one's goal.

Functional knowledge: What an individual knows about a written item (whether it be a form, bill, letter, advertisement, etc.) and its usage. A person may have considerable functional knowledge about something without being able to read it or do the writing it requires.

Independent reading level: The level of reading materials that an individual can handle by him/herself without help from a tutor.

Instructional reading level: The level of materials at which an individual may read, with supervision, to extend his/her skills. For successful instruction, the materials should be neither too easy nor too difficult for the learner.

Frustration reading level: The level which is too difficult for the learner and therefore frustrating. This level should be avoided with any learner with serious reading problems.

Lesson plan: A tool used by the tutor to plan future tutoring sessions. An instructional objective tied to the learner's goal is identified by the tutor, who then defines the steps, materials and procedures necessary to reach the objective, and ways to evaluate the results.

Setting Goals and Objectives

Learners set their own goals. Once you have met your learner(s) and have started the process of getting acquainted, you will have some information on which to begin to build your tutoring/training. One of your first tasks will be to think about the goals of your learners. If your learners know what they want to accomplish and were able to articulate that with you at the first meeting, you should have a clear idea of what their goals are. If, on the other hand, the youth are not sure themselves, you'll have to focus your work with them, at least at first, on interests they've expressed.

Tutors must understand learners' goals. We cannot overemphasize the importance of the tutor and the learner having a common understanding of the learner's goals. In adult literacy volunteer tutoring programs, this shared understanding is a key element in learner satisfaction with the program. The lack of a shared understanding may well be a critical factor in a learner's decision to drop out after a while.

The California Literacy Campaign (Wurzbacher & Yeannakis 1986) found that learners often tend to have large, life-enhancing goals (such as "get a better job" or "go on to college"). Tutors, on the other hand, tend to focus on more immediately achievable goals (such as getting their learners to the point of being able to fill out job applications or being able to read well enough to begin to study for the GED). Tutors must be careful to understand and appreciate what their learners want to accomplish--even if it seems an impossible dream--and must work closely with the learners, helping them see how the small steps they are taking are leading toward those larger goals while enhancing their lives along the way.

In basic skills training for street youth this kind of clear communication about goals is even more important. Youth are accustomed to having adults tune them out or discount what they say or want. The Takin' It to the Streets project is based on a learner-centered approach precisely because to reach street youth who are reluctant or uninterested in improving their basic skills the training must be relevant to their immediate needs and interests. It must be tailor-made for each of them.

The tutor helps to clarify and prioritize. You may find that some learners have a number of goals or that their goals are ill-defined. In such cases you will have to help the learners explore their ideas, clarifying what they think will happen if they are successful in achieving the goals. You may need to help them prioritize what they want to happen and identify the steps necessary to make it happen and the amount of energy and commitment needed by both of you. By discussing their goals and talking them through to successful achievement, you'll help the learners make choices about where to put their energy.

Goals may change. You must also be prepared for goals to change over time, particularly since adolescence is an exploratory stage and teenagers in general tend to be very changeable. Street youth are no exception. To be effective you must really listen to your learners. If you think you hear a change in goals, use your paraphrasing techniques to check it out. As you get to know the youth you may also be able to explore what is causing the change. It may be that the original interest was a smoke screen and that the youth is beginning to let you see his/her real interests, now that it appears that you can be trusted. Or it may be that your learner is unhappy with some aspect of the tutoring--maybe the pace is wrong, the original goal seems too unattainable, or the intermediate objectives are too easy. Using the communication techniques described in Focus Question 1 of this module, periodically check on your learner's perception of how things are going and whether or not the goals continue to seem appropriate and relevant.

The tutor leads in defining objectives. Your work with street youth will always be based on goals the learners have identified. However, it will be up to you to find ways to approach those goals. The steps required to reach the goals are the "objectives" of your tutoring/training sessions.

As you identify your objectives, there are several things to keep in mind:

- Your objectives should be based on the learner's interests and goals. Always check yourself to make sure you are not imposing what *you* need to accomplish to feel that the session was a success. Remember: In working with street youth the process may be more important than the product.
- You should be able to state the objectives clearly and simply. (See Lesson Planning below.)
- The objectives should be "do-able." You'll probably need to work at determining tasks that can be accomplished but are still challenging.

A Functional Approach: Building on Real-World Interests, Needs and Materials

Using the learner's world as your curriculum may sound wonderful, but it also sounds a little difficult. If you are not a trained and experienced teacher, you may wonder just how you will be able to build on your learner's interests and create useful teaching materials from bus schedules, job application forms, and WIC nutritional information sheets.

Topics come from street life or youths' aspirations. As we have discussed earlier (see Module Two), street youth have multiple interests and needs that could provide useful and compelling materials and activities for basic skills tutoring/training. The following list will give you some idea of the types of tasks and topics you might focus on:

TOPICS LIST

Job Search

Want ads
Personal contact/information gathering
Job application
Resume
Record-keeping (wages)
W-4
Interview practice

Job-related Skills

Following written instructions
Writing receipts
Use of cash register
Adding lists
Filing (alpha order, etc.)
Inventory-taking
Using catalogs (looking things up)
Specific skills (TV, radio, computer, etc.)

Housing

Apartment ads
Rental applications
Rental agreements
Money orders
Checking accounts
Bulletin board ads
Addresses and directions

Transportation

Bus schedules
Driver's license (or I.D. application)
Bike repair
Car repair
Bike, motorcycle, car purchase
Map reading--figuring out addresses

Health

Medicine labels and instructions
Birth control
Pre-natal care
Drug addiction
AIDS education
Birth certificate
Doctor and dental forms

Food

Food Stamps application
WIC application
Food ads/coupons
Comparison shopping
Prices and weights/quantities
Nutrition
Food labels
Recipes
Menus

Clothing

Clothing styles/modeling
Clothing care (washing, mending, etc.)
Sewing
Knitting/crocheting

Consumer Goods

Catalogs, warranties, price comparisons

Entertainment

Concert fliers and posters
Arts & Entertainment
Willamette Week/Downtowner
Rock magazines
TV guide, etc.
Game instructions
Sports

Arts/Crafts/Music/Theater

News and Information

Personal Growth & Development

Creative Writing

- Journal writing
- Poetry
- Letters (personal)
- Letters to the Editor

Educating Society about Street Youth

- Theater (skits, farce)
- Writing (letters to ed., articles)
- Art work

Legal Rights of Youth

A sample tutoring session--Job Application Forms. To prepare for this session, either you have asked your learner to bring in an application form from a place where he/she would like to work, and/or you bring in some sample forms. You also have prepared in advance some sample forms of graduated difficulty, starting with the simplest (basic personal information, such as name, address, and phone). See the following pages for some examples.

FILLING OUT A FORM

Mr.
Mrs.
Name Ms.
Sex: M ☐
F ☐

Last First Middle

Address
Number Street

City State Zip Code Telephone

Mr.
Mrs.
Name Ms.
Sex: M ☐
F ☐

Last First Middle

Address
Number Street

City State Zip Code Telephone

Date of Birth Place of Birth

Mr.
Mrs.
Name Ms.
Male ☐
Female ☐

Address
Number Street

City State Zip Code Social Security No.

Telephone Date of Birth Place of Birth

APPLICATION FOR EMPLOYMENT

1. Title of position ____________________ Beginning date __________

2. Name Mr. / Mrs. / Miss ______________________________
Last (Print) First Middle (Maiden Name)

3. Address ______________________________ Home Telephone __________
Street and Number City State Zip Code

4. Age ______ Date of birth __________ Social Security No. ____/____/____ U.S. Citizen ____

5. Marital Status: Single ______ Married ______ Widowed ______ Divorced ______

6. In case of accident, notify __________ Address __________ Phone __________

7. Circle the highest grade you completed in each school	Name and location of school	Dates
High School 9 10 11 12		
College 1 2 3 4		
Col. Post-grad: Sem. Hrs.____		
Professional or Voc. Schools		

8. List your jobs for the last five years.

From Mo./Yr.	*To* Mo./Yr.	Employer's Name, Address, Telephone Number, and Name of Last Supervisor	Salary	Position	Reason for Leaving

9. What are your hobbies and interests? ______________________________

____

10. ______________________________ Date ______________
Signature

Your learner's name is Terry. He's 16, he's been on the streets for 2-1/2 years, supporting himself any way he could, and now he's anxious to make some changes. He wants a job. But he has trouble filling out the applications.

You learned all this in a previous conversation. You might also have heard something about his previous experiences with this type of form, but in Terry's case you didn't learn much. During this session you begin by asking about what Terry already knows about job application forms and the circumstances surrounding their use. He knows he needs to have a residence address where he can be reached (and that employers often recognize youth agency addresses and cross street youth off their list of potential employees). He also knows it would be very helpful to have a phone number where he could receive messages. He knows, too, about the importance of having accurate previous job experience information and references, and he feels quite hampered by his age and lack of bonafide job experience. What Terry doesn't seem very aware of is the importance of taking special care to fill out the form neatly and clearly, without spelling errors or erasures or write-overs. You quickly see that your tutoring may include much more than basic skills (reading, writing and math skills)--you may become a mentor, providing other types of "functional" knowledge as well.

Based on what Terry knows about the information needed for the form, you ask him to begin reading it aloud. He stumbles on the word "security" but immediately recognizes that it's where you write in your Social Security number. You compliment him on how he's able to figure it out based on what he already knows. "Security" as part of "Social Security" can be a sight word Terry will quickly learn.

You have Terry copy the words he has difficulty with onto 3x5 index cards, one for each card. These are the sight words you work on with him, talking about their meaning, commenting on their location on the forms, looking for contextual clues to help him remember them.

As Terry reads the application, you notice he could use some help distinguishing long and short vowels. You make a mental note to plan some work on this for the next session.

This session you also help Terry explore his work experience and think of ways to describe the skills he has to offer. And you discuss materials you will bring in next time that relate to his interest in searching for a job. (In your next session you will first review what you did this time and work on the sight words before moving on to something new.)

Generic steps for tutoring with real-world materials. As you have seen in the sample tutoring session with Terry, there are certain steps to follow when using real-world materials for tutoring. Perhaps the most important has to do with acknowledging and building on the learner's **functional knowledge**. Our research has shown that adults with low level basic skills generally have considerable knowledge about written items encountered in daily life even if they can't read them or fill them out (Reder & Green 1983; Reder, Conklin, & Green 1985). Ask the learner to tell you about the item:

- Tell me something you know about this.
- Can you tell me anything about what it's used for?
- Who can use it?
- Where can you get it?
- What will happen if you use it?
- How often can you or do you have to use it?

You'll almost certainly find that street youth have considerable functional knowledge about the items/topics they're interested in learning to deal with.

Before you start, be sure of your own functional knowledge. No matter what topic you focus on with your learner, be sure that you know something about its use before trying to base your tutoring on it. Also, and this is very important, always be certain that any exercises you create based on a real-world task or item are as true to the real task or the real use of the item as possible. Any practice activity that does not seem relevant is likely to be quickly rejected, and anything that resembles "busy work" (such as apparently pointless workbook activities) may cause you to lose your learner. This does not mean that flights of fancy will not be acceptable formats for tutoring, however. Forms of creative writing and use of humor are popular.

When using real-world materials, try to follow these steps:

1) **Focus on the learner's interests.** Ask why he/she's interested in this, what she wants to do with it, why he wants to learn to use it.

2) **Build on the learner's strengths--his/her functional knowledge.** For example, before you start to try to "teach" anything about the item or topic, find out what the learner already knows about it.

3) **Have the youth begin to read the item.** If he/she is hesitant, use the "functional" (or contextual) knowledge you have uncovered--his/her strengths--to help him/her identify things he/she knows. Give clues by using something the learner said about it previously; ask leading questions.

4) As the learner reads, **check informally for the reading level**: independent, instructional, or frustration.

5) **If the learner appears to be frustrated by the materials, try simplifying them if possible.**

6) **Try teaching some of the key words as sight words.** For example, many adults who cannot sound out or spell the word "signature," know exactly where to sign their names on different forms.

7) **Use the words in the item as material for studying word attack skills.**

Creating your own materials. In addition to job applications and other types of daily life "survival" topics and tasks, there are many other uses of reading and writing that can be adapted as materials for tutoring street youth. Think back to the interests and needs of street youth described in Module One. Here are some relevant materials and activities you might use in your tutoring[1]:

- Forms, information sheets, and applications, such as employment applications, Medicaid and Social Security information and forms, materials relating to juvenile justice, information sheets that are used by youth agencies, AFDC applications for new mothers.
- Books and magazines about youth culture, teen life, and adolescents' and young adults' interests, such as health and beauty, cars and mechanics, interpersonal relations, family issues, pregnancy and early childhood, spirituality, science fiction, fantasy, mystery, romance, entertainment, and music. There are also social and political issues with which youth are deeply concerned, for example, nuclear war.

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[1] Excerpted and adapted from Nancy Faires Conklin and Janise Hurtig, *Making the connection: A report for literacy volunteers working with out-of-school youth*, pp. 73-74, Portland, OR: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 1986.

- Journal-writing, letter-writing, creative and expressive writing. Good penmanship is, for many youth, an indicator of writing skill and the only aspect of peers' writing that youth are wont to comment on; penmanship practice might be built in. Youth may want to develop writing skills by corresponding with their families or friends. Letters to the Editor can be meaningful and empowering activities.

- Newspapers, especially the "Living" or women's section (girls read it regularly), sports, entertainment, and the classified ads.

- Drivers' training courses, for motorcycles as well as cars.

- Computer skills classes, also pedagogies that use the computer as a learning tool. The computer is both highly attractive to youth (especially boys) and also a means to let them learn with greater independence and privacy.

- Contests. Competitions such as essay contests (some of whose entries are reprinted in this manual) are highly successful. A competition provides an opportunity for youth to achieve success publicly, a much-needed boost to their self-esteem. Be sure, however, that there are no "losers"--these kids have already been branded as losers.

- Youth newsletters. In Portland one of the local youth agencies sponsors a newsletter written by and for street youth and spearheaded by youth who have recently left the street life. It publishes news of interest to youth, interviews, and all forms of youth writing.

- Stories and information about people with experiences like their own, e.g., teenage pregnancy and motherhood, family separation, family violence, youth living independent lives, substance abusers. For most of these subjects, materials can be obtained from local agencies such as Alcoholics Anonymous, Planned Parenthood, Juvenile Justice. These are sensitive topics and their use with any individual should be pursued in consultation with the agency counselor.

- Writing that encourages youth to describe positive experiences in their own lives, to create positive fantasies for themselves. These can then dovetail with therapeutic work or direct the tutor toward activities that would serve the youth's long-range goals.

- Pre-employment information, such as profiles of various kinds of jobs, job-training materials, descriptions of the local labor market and local employers.

Remember, in selecting any materials it is extremely important that they not have a juvenile or textbook-like appearance. Street youth think of themselves as adults, because they function as independent persons. School, for many, was "a bore," and textbooks and worksheets were the most boring work of all. Working with authentic forms and materials found in everyday life helps avoid the feelings of lack of relevance that many street youth associated with school.

Commercial materials based on everyday life. You will not necessarily have to spend all your waking hours away from the tutoring sessions creating more materials. Many publishers have responded to the need for adult and teen level materials based on the issues and activities of daily life. Some of these may be very useful to you, especially after you have identified your learner's interests and needs. (See the Other Resources section of this manual for suggested commercial "functionally-based" materials and a checklist to use in selecting materials.) Just remember, the same rules apply when using commercial materials: Listen to your learner and make sure the materials and activities are relevant, interesting and appropriate for his/her skill levels and goals.

Lesson Planning: Clear but Flexible

A tool for you. Although you are making your actual sessions with your learners as unlike school as possible, you will find writing lesson plans a very useful technique for you as a tutor. You need never show them to your learners--that is not their purpose. They are to help you prepare and make the best use of your time with the youth.

Lesson plans can be very simple. As you can see in the accompanying form, you identify the overall goal and then list five items:

1) the objective;
2) the steps to achieve the objective;
3) the necessary materials;
4) the procedures you will use; and,
5) how you will evaluate how the session went.

Here is a sample lesson plan. It is an example of a lesson plan that might have been written for the session with Terry described above.

Volunteer: Dorothy

LESSON PLAN

Learner: Terry

Date: October 30, 1987

Objective of This Lesson: To be able to fill out job application forms

Steps to reach the objective:	Materials	Procedures	Evaluation
1. To find out what Terry knows about job applications.	1. Sample job applications: a) Some simplified versions b) More complete versions c) Actual job applications	1. Talk with Terry about job application forms: - What are they used for? - What information do they usually ask for? - What parts are hardest to fill out (and why)? - What experiences has he had with job applications?	
2. To determine Terry's level of familiarity with terms used in job applications.	2. An actual job application form	2. a. Have Terry start to read a real form. b. If too difficult, talk about what he already said was on the forms and guide him to those parts on this particular form.	2. Mental note of words or areas of difficulty
3. To teach key terms as sight words.	3. Words that are difficult for Terry. Blank index cards.	3. Have Terry copy each word on a blank index card. Work on memorizing them. Practice reading them in context on the application.	3. Give Terry the cards of the words he knows; count the known words and words to be learned.
4. To practice reading and filling out a form.	4. A simplified form.	4. Ask Terry to fill out the form as best he can.	4. If relatively easy, go on to more complete forms.

Volunteer: Dorothy

LESSON PLAN

Learner: Terry

Date: October 30, 1987

Objective of This Lesson: Job applications, continued

Steps to reach the objective:	Materials	Procedures	Evaluation
5. To work on neatness.		5. Talk about need for neatness.	5. Ask Terry to look for any areas that could be improved.
6. To find out Terry's view of the usefulness of this session.		6. Take stock together: - What did you accomplish? - Was it useful? - What might you do next? - Any opportunities to try out what Terry has learned in a real life situation? - Any new topics he wants to focus on?	

Volunteer: ____________________

LESSON PLAN

Learner: ____________________

Objective of This Lesson: ____________________

Date: ____________________

Steps to reach the objective:	Materials	Procedures	Evaluation

Be willing to change plans. No matter how organized your lesson plan is or how much time you spent preparing it, you must remain flexible. If you find the planned activities are not working for some reason, or your learner has come in with a totally different--but pressing--need, you have to be willing to change your plans and try to address the new situation.

Plan challenging yet achievable activities. We have noted the importance of planning "do-able" activities. In order to keep reluctant learners participating, you must provide activities in which they can experience some immediate success. What complicates this is the need for the activities to also be challenging enough to maintain the learners' interest. This implies the need for graduated levels of difficulty and a keen sensitivity on the part of the tutor for the learner's frustration and surrender instead of stimulation.

Working one-on-one may make it easier to be sensitive, but street youth are experienced at covering up their emotions and insecurities. As a tutor, you will have to be continually honing your communication skills, picking up clues and subtle reactions.

Integrate assessments into the learning process. Being able to test your learner's skills would make the task of creating or choosing challenging yet achievable materials easier. Formal assessment, however, will not be appropriate in this project unless it is directly related to the learner's goal, as in the case of preparing for the driver's test or the GED. Assessments may also be conducted if they can be integrated into the learning process--as in the case of the application of certain skills in a job simulation activity, for example.

Even informal reading inventories (in which the learner reads graded lists of words and paragraphs aloud and answers comprehension questions) will usually be too test-like for the learners in the Takin' It to the Streets project--at least until sufficient trust has been established and the learner is openly committed to improving his/her basic skills. Even then, because many of these youth are likely to have difficulty taking tests, it will be more useful to build your assessments into the learning process. You can mentally note certain problems or types of errors and then record your observations after the session is over, to help you in your planning of future sessions.

References

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MODULE FIVE

Focus Question 2

Outcome

FOCUS QUESTION 2: What should I consider in planning subsequent training sessions?

Outcome: A set of planning strategies that will help you respond to your learners' needs and interests and provide meaningful, useful and attractive basic skills training.

Instructions: Think back over what you have learned about setting goals and objectives and the functional, real-world approach to tutoring we have described. Your task now is to write a lesson plan for your first substantive tutoring session with one of the young learners described below:

> Case 1. Linda is 14 years old. She ran away from home because her mother had a new boyfriend with whom she didn't get along. Linda had experienced years of physical abuse from her father before he left her mother and she was leary of more of the same. She's been on the streets for about eight months. She's very shy of strangers and unwilling to say much about her schooling and her reading skills, but her counselor at the agency knows she reads at a pretty low level. The counselor convinced Linda to talk with you and the first "getting acquainted" session went pretty well. You found out that she likes to write poetry. It looks like she's going to come back again to try to work on reading and writing some poetry with you.
>
> Case 2. Phil is 17. He's been around, but nobody knows how long he's been on his own. He's trying to get off the streets. He and a couple of friends want to find an apartment together, but they don't know how to read the want ads and rental lease agreements. One of the counselors suggested you might be able to help. You met with Phil and his friends and they've agreed to meet with you for some sessions.

Choose one of these two cases and use the Lesson Plan form on the next page to plan a lesson.

Volunteer: ____________________

LESSON PLAN

Learner: ____________________

Date: ____________________

Objective of This Lesson: ______________________________

Steps to reach the objective:	Materials	Procedures	Evaluation

Volunteer: ____________________

LESSON PLAN

Learner: ____________________

Date: ____________________

Objective of This Lesson: ____________________

Steps to reach the objective:	Materials	Procedures	Evaluation

MODULE FIVE

Focus Question 3

FOCUS QUESTION 3: What special planning strategies will I need to be able to present a topical workshop or set up drop-in helping at an agency?

Objective: To identify steps for setting up topical workshops and drop-in helping.

Critical Points

- Many of the points made in Focus Question 1 about getting acquainted, communicating with youth and exploring interests will be of value to you as you establish contact with street youth in a workshop or drop-in setting.
- As in Focus Question 2, the basic premises of our approach to basic skills training for street youth apply:
  - The learners select the goals.
  - You, the workshop presenter or drop-in helper, take the lead in defining the objectives.
  - The training must be relevant.
  - You build on learners' strengths and functional knowledge.
  - You encourage collaboration.
  - You focus on process, not product.
- The logistics of setting up your sessions will be specific to your training format.

Topical Workshop Presentation

The need for a topically focused group activity. As described in Module Three, topical workshops serve several purposes:

- o They provide information on a topic of interest to street youth.
- o They allow youth to participate in an optional, group setting, without having to make individual commitments (which they might not be able to keep).
- o They may be a non-threatening first step in re-awakening a young person's interest in improving his/her skills.
- o They provide contact for potential identification of basic skills training needs and possible referral to other training formats.

The possibilities for workshop topics are wide-ranging. The main criteria for selection of topics are that some street youth have a strong interest in them and that basic skills can be used in ways that are relevant to the topics. The basic skills use criterion can be met with nearly any topic, if only through reading about it. However, the more natural and integrated the use of reading, writing or quantitative skills is in a topic, the better the training will be.

The following list of topics resulted from a brainstorming session with a group of street youth during the pilot phase of Takin' It to the Streets:

- o Public Awareness: Educating Society about Street Youth

    - Theater
    - Display of art, writing, photos, etc., at Pioneer Square and/or in Nordstrom or Meier & Frank windows
    - Book on street life and ways to get off the streets

- o Youth Awareness: Legal Rights of Street Youth

- o Personal Growth:

    Nutrition and Physical Fitness

    - How to eat well on a limited income (and with limited cooking facilities) (Include in "How to Live on Minimum Wage?" or spin off?)
    - Aerobics instruction (need space)

    Self-Confidence

    (especially in dealing with people; speaking to people)

- o Employment:

    Setting up a Job Bank

  - Central phone number where people could call to get help with yard work, etc.

  Job-Specific Training (which could tie into the Job Bank)

  - Keyboard skills
  - TV/Radio--media-related jobs

- o Other:

  Basic Skills (but not in a school-type program)

  Something Just For Fun (Music, Dancing)

Most of the items on the list of street youths' interests in Focus Question 2 of this module could also form the foundation of a topical workshop or a series of workshops.

Numerous workshop activities can be developed around a topic. Let's use job-related basic skills training--a high priority with street youth--as an example. Most youth are caught up in the need to read the want ads and be able to fill out job application forms. Clearly these are topics that could be the focus of a workshop. But beyond these common job-related basic skills needs, there are many things a presenter could do to help prepare youth more adequately for the job market. In fact, a whole series of workshops could easily be set up around the topic of basic skills for the workplace.

As a well-known job literacy consultant has suggested (Mikulecky 1984), workplace literacy generally requires more reading than individuals did in school. It also requires being able to communicate well with others and react appropriately to various forms of print and graphics. To prepare youth for the job environment, teachers (and tutors) should use a wide variety of materials:

- newspapers
- pamphlets
- instructions
- forms
- memos and announcements
- manuals
- charts
- tables
- graphs
- advertisements
- directories
- correspondence

Job-related tasks are often social or group tasks--asking and answering questions of other workers and clients. Thus, a workshop presenter could build on the natural tendency of street youth to collaborate on a task.

Focusing on job-related basic skills, a workshop presenter might undertake the following types of activities[1]:

- Practice using the telephone directory--to find business addresses, for example.
- Practice asking questions.
- Practice recording information from phone inquiries.
- As an exercise and to accumulate tutoring materials, have participants write to solicit information on local employers and to request site visits.
- Undertake worksite visits and interview managers about their demands for reading and writing on the job.
- In groups or individually, have participants develop summaries of materials received and sites visited.
- Have participants keep their own records of training activities and progress; have them assist in filing and record maintenance in the workshop setting.
- Draw on the exercises in life planning that social service personnel use in working with youth; relate the youths' descriptive essays to lists of job possibilities and try to get them to integrate their personal and employment aspirations into written forms.
- Have participants design future workshop activities, thinking through the multiple steps necessary to set up and carry out the activities.

Setting up a workshop. The steps to follow in order to set up a topical workshop for street youth include:

1. **Identify a topic.** It should be:
   a) something you think youth are interested in, and
   b) something with which you have had personal, hands-on experience, so that you'll be able to create activities based on real uses of basic skills related to the topic.
2. **Discuss the topic with the project coordinator.** Together you will determine whether or not it is viable as a workshop. The coordinator will also discuss it with various agencies to find an appropriate setting.

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[1] Adapted from Nancy Faires Conklin and Janise Hurtig, *Making the connection: A report for literacy volunteers working with out-of-school youth*, p. 75. Portland, OR: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 1986.

3. **Determine if it will be one session only or a series of workshops.** In some cases you may start out with a topic for one session and discover sufficient interest and questions to warrant further workshops on the topic. The reverse might also occur: You may have designed a series of workshops only to find lower interest in the topic than originally anticipated.

4. **Meet with your host agency contact.** Clarify focus, interest levels, logistics (facilities, best time, etc.), and publicity. In most cases, agency staff will help you get the word out. You may ask for bulletin board space and suggestions about other forms of publicity.

5. **Plan activities.** There are a number of things to keep in mind as you plan your workshop presentations.

   a. **Sign-up sheet.** You'll ask participants to sign a sheet that you circulate. This is a common practice at most agencies, so it should not alienate anyone. The agency wants to know who attended the service you are providing. You and the project coordinator will also want to know for future workshops or referrals.

   b. **Getting acquainted.** This will depend on the size and composition of the group and the workshop topic. You may introduce yourself and jump right into the topic, since that is what the youth have come for. However, for many topics some discussion of participants' interests and experience with the topic is appropriate.

   Recall one of the fundamental rules of the functional approach described in Focus Question 2: **By focusing on the learners' interests you can discover and build on their strengths.** You'll be the judge of the group's response to this type of self-disclosure. For some groups it will be perfectly acceptable. For others you'll need more time to establish some rapport first.

   c. **Presenting the topic.** General rules to follow:

      (1) Engage the kids actively (and quickly).
      (2) Start with something very interesting to grab their attention.
      (3) Make it fun--be creative.
      (4) Make sure it's relevant and useful to the youths' lives.
      (5) Encourage the kids to collaborate on the task(s).
      (6) Build on their strengths whenever possible.
      (7) Make the task(s) do-able, so everyone feels they've accomplished something even after one session.
      (8) Be sure it's *not* like school.
      (9) Be sensitive to the youths' reactions to the various activities.
      (10) Watch for interest in or need for individualized help. (Tutors can be incorporated into subsequent workshops or youth can be referred for other training formats.)

In your presentation you must be very careful not to use a lecture technique. Street youth have stressed with us that they *are* interested in basic skills training and workshops, but *not* if they are presented like school. The format must be open to discussion and negotiation.

Above all, you must quickly engage the participants in some activity so that you maintain their interest. In the case of job-related basic skills training (beyond job applications or want ads reading), you might ask them as a group to brainstorm as many uses of reading and writing on the job as they can possibly think of. Then quickly list off some things they haven't thought of and get them started on one--such as looking up business addresses in the phone directory or following a set of instructions (make them silly, requiring physical responses). Be creative, make it fun and interesting, but also be sure to make it relevant.

Remember to plan an activity that can be completed by everyone during the session, so that anyone who never comes back at least goes away with a sense of accomplishment.

If you are doing a series of workshops, you may want to prioritize activities so that the most valued, most interesting, or most critical skills to know happen early in the series. This will help grab kids' interest. It will also help ensure that the youth who do not continue during the whole series at least receive fundamentally important training. The project coordinator and perhaps the agency staff can help you order your series of workshops.

6. **Evaluating the workshop(s).**

Focus Question 4 below deals with aspects of evaluation of volunteer efforts. However, a few comments are appropriate here. Just being in tune to your participants as you present the workshop will give you a fair idea of how things are going. How actively they participate and whether they return for another session may be good indicators of how well you have been received.

As you try to judge the success of your efforts, however, remember what you learned in Module One of this manual. These youth have so many things going on in their lives, have such different time frames, and often have such changeable goals and interests that their interest or lack of interest in your workshop may have very little to do with you. Don't take it personally. And, remember the cardinal rule: Don't pin all your hopes for "success" on results; rather, focus on the *process* of working with these youth. Do a careful, caring, conscientious job on the process and you will be a successful volunteer.

Drop-in Helping

A service and a hook. As noted in Module Three, drop-in helping can provide a much needed service for street youth and agency personnel as well. Having a trained volunteer available on the premises to answer requests for help with basic skills tasks fills street youths' need for immediate attention to pressing problems. It also can take some of the pressure off heavily-booked agency staff. The drop-in helper is a resource, both for the youth and the agency.

Drop-in helping can also function as a hook--to spark the interest of reluctant learners and maybe pull them in. Someone approachable who regularly "hangs out" at an agency can help to begin to open the door to some form of training for many of these youth.

Personal skills you will need. To be an effective drop-in helper, you will need to be responsive, perceptive and sensitive. You'll need to feel comfortable around street youth and enjoy talking with them. You'll need to be good at establishing and building rapport, able to gradually draw kids out. And, you'll need to be able to think on your feet, quickly connecting a tentatively stated interest with some activity or material in your basic skills "bag of tricks."

Setting up a drop-in helping center. Hanging out may seem pretty unstructured. However, to do it well, you must have thought it through and prepared in advance for any number of potential interests, skill levels and situations. Being a drop-in helper requires the following steps:

1. **Identifying the site.** The project coordinator will have identified the agency site, location and hours for the drop-in helping.

2. **Meeting with the agency.** You will meet with the agency contact and review the logistics of setting up the drop-in center--where it will be located (open and accessible to encourage dropping in), furniture available for your use, where you can store materials, how staff will help encourage youth to drop by, possible places to put up posters and other publicity, etc.

3. **Outfitting the drop-in space.** The coordinator will supply you with a number of materials for your drop-in helping. In addition, as you work with youth who drop in, you'll surely think of other items that would be useful. Some you'll be able to pick up for free from agencies, companies, newsstands, friends, etc. Others you may talk to the coordinator about buying for the project. However, the project's budget for materials is small; it will be necessary to be creative in finding useful materials, games and activities for the drop-in center. (See sections 4.c. and 4.e. below for ideas about the wide range of materials you can use for drop-in helping.)

4. **Hanging out.** You'll need to take on several characteristics and roles as you "hang out" at the site:

   a. **Be approachable.** Make sure your body language, eye contact and tone of voice indicate you are open, friendly and interested in the kids around you.

   b. **Be responsive.** If someone has a comment or question--no matter the nature or content--be open and ready to respond. Remember: Neither a youth's initial inquiry, nor your response and follow-up activity have to be basic skills focused. If you can build rapport by having some fun with the kids and thereby generate trust and interest in what you're there for, do it.

      When you get an inquiry, focus on the question. Answer it if you can. If you cannot, try to find out who can or promise to find out for the next day you'll be there. And follow through! The youth may not return, but if he/she does, you must have at least tried to obtain the needed information. Every time you satisfy a "client" at your drop-in center, no matter how small the request, you have succeeded in beginning the process of re-engagement.

   c. **Generate interest.** Find ways to attract kids to your area. Display interesting magazines and pictures. Spread out a few games. Sit down and work at a portable computer (if one is available to you). Bring in some cookies if you can. Put up controversial news clippings on a bulletin board. Buy a paper each day and post the local want ads. Display the latest fashion ads or record jackets. Your imagination and your knowledge of what's "in" with street kids are the only limitations here.

   d. **Ask for some help.** If you're not sure about what's "in" or attractive, actively solicit some help. Draw kids into conversation and tell them you need their help to figure out how to make your area more interesting. Also ask them to spread the word about the hours you're there and the types of activities you can provide.

   e. **Display a wide variety of materials.** Your helping extends through a wide range of needs and interests. Be sure that your area indicates this. Don't let the most prominent books be only pre-GED or academic workbooks, for example. Be sure high interest fiction is highly visible. Display the types of forms and applications kids are most likely to need to use and have a stash of extra copies. Keep extra bus schedules on hand, and *Willamette Week*'s and *Downtowner*'s. Display schedules of events (especially free ones)--concerts, art exhibits, talks. Strategically place fliers and informational brochures around (for example, on health issues--prenatal care, AIDS prevention, drug abuse). Be sure to have other reference material, such as a phone book, youth or emergency services directory, dictionary, and community college catalogs.

   f. **Be a tutor.** Even on a short-term, one-shot basis, follow the basic steps for functionally-oriented tutoring outlined in Focus Question 2 of this module. Identify interests and help uncover individuals' strengths. Build on what they know. And encourage collaboration.

   g. **Be alert for potential referrals to other basic skills training formats.** Be careful not to become too involved with one learner to the extent that you neglect others who are or have the potential to become interested.

5. **Maintaining the supply of materials.** What if materials begin to walk away? To some extent, this is exactly how you might measure your success. If the youth are becoming so interested that they want to take materials with them, you may indeed have broken down some barriers. Unfortunately, this demonstration project's budget is not large enough to constantly refurbish supplies such as books, games and other equipment. So you'll have to keep an eye on some parts of your stash of materials. However, try to give away as many of the easily obtained materials as possible--fliers, newsletters, papers, schedules, etc.

6. **Evaluating the drop-in helping.** Drop-in helping is a very different process than the other formats for delivering basic skills training to street youth that we have described in this manual. Your contact with individual youths may be very fleeting. On the other hand, you may develop a group of "regulars" who enjoy hanging out with you. And eventually you may have some influence on them. That influence will not necessarily be clearly apparent. You may never know whether or not you succeeded in getting someone interested in reading or getting some further training.

   You will know, however, how many youths you talked with, worked with, provided some information to. You'll need to keep a log--filling it out after every drop-in session, noting the type of inquiry or interaction in each case. (See Focus Question 4, below.) This will help you, the project and the agency in planning future basic skills assistance and other services as well.

   Perhaps in this basic skills training format even more than in the others, it will be important to focus on the process, rather than the product. Providing useful information, orienting youth to various uses of basic skills and sources of information, helping with specific tasks--each of these small steps is as important as making referrals to further training.

   As a drop-in helper, then, you are part of a much bigger process. You are there to open the door and invite learners in, so that the larger process of learner development may begin to unfold.

References

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MODULE FIVE

Focus Question 3

Outcome

FOCUS QUESTION 3: What special planning strategies will I need to be able to present a topical workshop or set up drop-in helping at an agency?

Outcome: Specific strategies necessary for planning topical workshops and drop-in helping.

Instructions: By this time (having completed Module Three), you have decided which basic skills training format you want to do. This outcome exercise is for you only if you have chosen to become a workshop presenter or a drop-in helper.

For workshop presenters: Pick a topic you might be interested in presenting. On a separate sheet of paper try to outline one workshop session on this topic, based on the guidelines for planning workshop activities described in this Focus Question. Use these questions to help you plan:

- o Would you want to do something to get acquainted first? Why or why not?
- o What kind of activity could you start with to get the kids engaged quickly?
- o Can you think of something to make it fun?
- o Is the activity relevant to the topic and to the kids' lives?
- o Is it do-able?

As you outline the workshop, check yourself on other rules to follow in presenting the topic. Also, could there be spin-offs from this workshop--could it develop into a series?

For drop-in helpers:

1. Imagine yourself getting ready to set up shop at an agency. Make an extensive and creative list of the kinds of materials, games, activities, and equipment you'd like to have available for the youth. In this exercise, don't limit yourself with concerns about budget or availability. Make this your "wish list." Although we may not be able to supply you with everything on it, this list can serve to help us all find ways to make drop-in helping areas as interesting and stimulating as possible.

2. Make a list of the characteristics of an effective drop-in helper.

FOCUS QUESTION 4: How do I evaluate my work with these youth?

Objective: To consider some guidelines for reviewing the results of your basic skills training sessions.

Critical Points

- Each volunteer, no matter what basic skills training format she/he is using, will keep an Activity Log, noting time, activity, evaluation/comments, changes that occurred or that need to occur, etc.
- As you evaluate your progress, you should focus on the process, be sure to use appropriate criteria, listen to your learners' views, and try to hear and evaluate yourself.
- You need to be able to recognize when you may need outside help. Lack of progress may be due to a number of things, including: inaccurate determination of instructional reading level; a physical handicap; an emotional problem; drug addiction; or a learning disability.

Keeping a Log of Training You Provide

Whatever the format of the basic skills training you provide, you need to keep a log of your activities. (See attached Volunteer's Activity Log.) As soon as you have completed the training session (tutoring, small group, workshop or drop-in helping), schedule time to sit down and review your lesson plan and think about what happened. Ask yourself the following questions:

- How do I feel about the session? Why?
- Who showed up?
- What was their general reaction?
- Was my plan appropriate?
- Did the objective(s) fit the learners' goal(s)?
- How did the learners respond?
- Were the activities I chose:
  - relevant and meaningful?
  - well integrated into the learners' real-life needs/interests?
  - challenging enough?
  - do-able?
  - fun?
- Was I able to find out something about the learners' functional knowledge in this area?
- Did I build on their strengths?
- When we got into actual basic skills building, how well did the tutoring techniques work?
- What could I do better?
- Are the participants learning something?--are they learning what they came for?
- Are there areas where I need some help?
- Is there anything in particular I need to know about the learners?
- Are they coming back?
- Based on today's session, what shall I plan for next time or how shall I change my plans?

Volunteer: ______________________

VOLUNTEER'S ACTIVITY LOG

Learner: ______________________

Date	Hours	Activity	New Participants or Interruptions?	Evaluation/Comments	Further Action?	
					Contact	Done?

Fill out your log religiously. Don't put it off. Both the kids and you will benefit from your careful consideration of each time you get together. Note any changes in procedure, response to you, attendance (and number attending), promptness, attentiveness, etc. If anything happened or developed that you think requires some further action, note that in the special column on the log, so that you will remember and follow through. You will turn your logs in to the project coordinator weekly during the first month and then on a monthly basis.

You will also fill out an abbreviated log to turn in daily to the agency counselor. (See Module Six.)

Evaluating Progress

Focus on the process. As you review the session, be careful not to be too hard on yourself--or on the youth. As noted earlier in this manual, youth social service agency staff stress that when working with street youth you must change your definition of "success." Even though we have described the importance of identifying goals and objectives for your tutoring/training, it is extremely important that you be able to separate yourself from those goals and invest your energies in the process of working with these youth.

The young people you tutor may not make great strides toward the goals they originally identified. They may indeed drop out entirely. Or, they may whittle away at the activities you suggest, while learning to interact with a trustworthy adult (you) in an open and honest way. As we have said before, if you succeed in helping them make even one small step toward improving their basic skills and/or stabilizing their lives, you will have achieved progress and even success.

Be pleased with small gains. Consider small gains in skills or knowledge as real progress. Try to structure the tutoring/training you provide so that there are numerous, small increments in level of difficulty or type of skill. In this way there will be many opportunities for success.

Also, remember to consider participation as progress. If Mike doesn't usually show up at the agreed time and today he did, make a note of it. That's progress! And if Mike never comes again, don't take it personally. It may well have absolutely nothing to do with you or your tutoring abilities.

Use appropriate criteria. As you evaluate progress, be absolutely sure that the criteria you use are based on the skills and materials you and the youth are focusing on. Since much of the tutoring/training done in Takin' It to the Streets is functionally-based, most evaluations will occur naturally as youth learn to apply new skills to specific real-world tasks. How well Terry is able to fill out an actual job application form is clearly an appropriate evaluation. The more natural (uncontrived) the evaluation, the more successful your work is likely to be.

Listen to learners' perceptions. Whenever possible, be sure to find out what your learners think about the training. Let them know that the training is for them and if they have any ideas or suggestions for improving it or changing it, you really want to hear them. If you have learners who stick with you over a period of time, be sure to include them and their perceptions of their progress in your evaluations. You may also receive feedback from the agency counselor who works with these youth, either directly or through the project coordinator.

Listen to yourself. Be sure to evaluate yourself also as you tutor. Periodically ask yourself the following questions:[1]

1. Do I wait impatiently for my student to finish so that I can talk?
2. Am I in such a hurry to offer a solution that I really don't hear the problem?
3. Am I listening only for what I like to hear?
4. Do prejudices sometimes interfere with my listening?
5. Do my thoughts wander while my learner is talking?
6. Do I sometimes pretend to listen?
7. Do I realize that sometimes my learner and I can discuss the same point on different wave lengths?
8. Am I alert for misunderstandings that could arise because words don't always mean the same to me as they do to my learner?

Knowing When to Get Help

Part of evaluating your work with street youth is being able to recognize when you need to request outside help, either for exploring new teaching techniques or for identifying learning disabilities, emotional or drug-related problems. You will have monthly tutor meetings at which diagnostic and teaching issues will be addressed. If you communicate regularly with the project coordinator, she/he will be able to compile tutor requests for further information and arrange for meetings on specific topics.

In between meetings, however, you may well need a more immediate answer to a question. You know that in working with street youth, the faster you can respond to and resolve a problem, the better the service you are providing. If you have tried a number of the techniques suggested in this manual and are having difficulty finding something at the right level for your learner(s) or simply can't seem to make any headway, even though the learner is really trying, you should consider several possibilities:

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[1] Adapted from "Self-Evaluation Checklist for Tutors" by Dorothy Brehm. In Marie Hermanson and Dorothy Brehm, *Tutor handbook*. Portland, OR: Portland Community Volunteer Tutoring Program, 1987.

- You may not be accurately determining your learner's instructional reading level.
- Your learner may have a physical handicap of which you are not aware. (Even the learner may not have identified this as a serious problem.) This includes visual or hearing impairments, as well as speech or hand-eye coordination problems.
- Your learner may have an emotional problem that is interfering with his/her ability to learn.
- Your learner may have a drug addiction.
- Your learner may have some form of learning disability.

Think carefully about each of these possibilities and try, without too much probing, to rule out as many as you can. You may need to check with the youth's counselor and with your coordinator. Once you have isolated the problem, the coordinator can also help you determine what your role should be.

What is a learning disability? As you learned in Module Two, young people drop out of school for many different reasons, only one of which may be inability to do the work. However, dropouts may have originally fallen behind in school due to a difference in learning style or a learning disability. The following definition is offered to help to clear up misconceptions about the nature of learning disabilities. A learning disability is:

> A disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or using spoken or written language. These may be manifested as disorders in listening, thinking, talking, reading, writing, spelling or arithmetic, and may include conditions referred to as dyslexia, brain injury, or minimal brain dysfunction. It does not include learning problems which are due primarily to visual, auditory, or motor impairment, to mental retardation, emotional disturbance, or environmental disadvantage (Schmeer 1987).

According to this definition, a person may be learning disabled if he/she :

- is of average or above average intelligence;
- demonstrates severe difficulty in spoken or written language, including reading, writing and arithmetic; and
- is not primarily handicapped by physical, emotional, or environmental factors.

Here's a checklist of common characteristics of learning disabled college students:

Some Common Characteristics
of
LD College Students

Reading Skills

1. Slow reading rate and/or difficulty in modifying reading rate in accordance with material difficulty.
2. Poor comprehension and retention.
3. Difficulty identifying important points and themes.
4. Poor mastery of phonics, confusion of similar words, difficulty integrating new vocabulary.

Written Language Skills

1. Difficulty with sentence structure (e.g., incomplete sentences, run-on's, poor use of grammar, missing inflectional endings).
2. Frequent spelling errors (e.g., omissions, substitutions, transpositions), especially in specialized and foreign vocabulary.
3. Inability to copy correctly from a book or the blackboard.
4. Slow writer.
5. Poor penmanship (e.g., poorly-formed letters, incorrect use of capitalization, trouble with spacing, overly-large handwriting).

Oral Language Skills

1. Inability to concentrate on and comprehend oral language.
2. Difficulty in orally expressing ideas which he/she seems to understand.
3. Written expression is better than oral expression.
4. Difficulty speaking grammatically correct English.
5. Cannot tell a story in proper sequence.

Mathematical Skills

1. Incomplete mastery of basic facts (e.g., mathematical tables).
2. Reverses numbers (e.g., 123 to 321 or 231).
3. Confuses operational symbols, especially + and x.

References

Schmeer, Carolee. (1987). Guidelines for identifying and teaching learning disabled students. Portland, OR: Portland Community College Alternative Learning Center.

MODULE FIVE

Focus Question 4

Outcome

FOCUS QUESTION 4: How do I evaluate my work with these youth?

Outcome: A set of guidelines to follow as you review the results of your sessions.

Instructions: Think about some of the things you'll want to check yourself on as you provide basic skills training to street youth and particularly after each session.

1. Make a list of at least five major questions you'll ask yourself.

2. Why is focusing on the process so important?

3. a. Have you learned something new about learning disabilities?

b. What characteristics or behaviors might make you think a learning disability was part of the problem?

c. What other possible reasons for lack of progress would you check first?

MODULE SIX

SUPPORT SERVICES FOR VOLUNTEERS

As a volunteer basic skills tutor working at youth social service agencies, it is essential that you respect the limited time of agency personnel. This module delineates the nature of your contact with agency counselors and suggests when it is most appropriate to first contact the project coordinator. Here we also describe the support services you may expect from the project, through consultations with the coordinator and monthly volunteer meetings.

FOCUS QUESTION 1: What contact should I maintain with the agency counselor?

Outcome: An understanding of the parameters of your interactions with the agency counselor.

FOCUS QUESTION 2: What contact should I maintain with the project coordinator and other volunteers?

Outcome: An understanding of what you can expect from the project and the importance of your role in improving the design and delivery of basic skills training for street youth.

MODULE SIX

Focus Question 1

FOCUS QUESTION 1: What contact should I maintain with the agency counselor?

Objective: To spell out clearly the nature and frequency of your contact with agency staff.

Critical Points

- Because agency counselors have heavy caseloads, you must respect their time and limit your contacts with them.
- You should establish an agreement with the counselor about reasons and times to consult. Be sure to meet periodically to evaluate the status and progress of the basic skills training for individual learners.
- You need to be clear about your role and your limitations.
- You should report any emergency situation immediately to agency personnel. Do not attempt to resolve it yourself.
- You'll need to report attendance activities daily to the agency to keep counselors up to date.

Respect agency staff time.

As a volunteer tutor working at the social service agency site, you are part of a team. As indicated in the agreement you will sign with the agency and the project coordinator (see Module Four), you must abide by the rules and regulations of the agency. You must also recognize that you have been welcomed into the agency because you have been carefully screened and trained and are providing a much needed service for the agency's young clientele. You are a resource. If you do your job well, you not only will be helping the street youth who frequent the agency, but you will also help the agency staff. However, if at any time you begin to take up too much staff time in consultations about your work, your welcome will vanish.

One of the first things agencies asked us when they considered participating in this project was, "How much staff time will it take?" It is, therefore, critical that you be very careful to limit your interactions with agency staff and refrain from any possible interference in their work. You must learn to differentiate when to consult agency personnel and when to go to the project coordinator. Focus Question 2 in this module outlines situations which merit or require contacting the project coordinator.

In your first meeting with the agency counselor, establish an agreement about appropriate reasons and times to consult.

The counselor not only recommends or encourages the youth to participate in the basic skills training, but also closely monitors his/her reactions and progress. The youth's well-being is of utmost importance, and the counselor has the responsibility to safeguard that if possible. When you first meet with the counselor he/she will share with you whatever pertinent information is available about the youth's educational and training background, needs and interests. If the youth has a particular goal articulated, the counselor will let you know.

As members of the team working with the youth, you and the counselor will meet periodically to evaluate the youth's reactions to your efforts. How frequently you meet will be up to the counselor, but should not be less often than once a month. Find out what day of the week and time of day is best to reach the counselor and establish a schedule for touching base. At first it may be appropriate to meet every two weeks. The counselor will be anxious to keep a close eye on your interactions. If things go well and you establish a good pattern of tutoring/training with the youth, your consultations with the counselor will be less frequent, perhaps only when an issue or question arises.

Be clear about your role.

To fulfill your role on this team, you must be clear about your purpose and responsibilities. You are at the agency as a basic skills volunteer tutor. As we have pointed out earlier in this manual, you must accept your role and its limitations. You are not a counselor; there is no need for you to know the full history of your learner's life. You are not trained to deal with the array and depth of problems that may arise. And you are not responsible for resolving all your learner's problems.

In case of emergency, IMMEDIATELY call agency staff.

As you learned in Module One, you will be working in situations in which explosive displays of anger or hostility are not uncommon. Also, street youth use drugs and carry weapons for their protection. At first you may feel that you don't know how to distinguish an emergency from an emotional outburst which is therapeutic and will pass quickly. You will learn from experience. When in doubt, give the kids the benefit of the doubt. Trainers for volunteers working with street youth advise that you use your common sense at the initial sign of an outburst.[1] If you sense that a situation may calm down (and your calling in the agency troops would only inflame it), trust your intuition.

If, on the other hand a youth is behaving violently and appears to be dangerous to him/herself or others, do not hesitate to call agency staff. (The agencies will have told you how to do this.) Agency personnel request that you do not attempt to talk the youth out of the behavior or resolve the situation yourself.

Keep the agency counselor informed of the learner's participation. Turn in attendance and activity logs daily.

For the agency staff to do their part in encouraging the learners to participate in this basic skills training, as well as to monitor their reactions to it, they must know what's going on. Daily logs may seem overdone, but the changeability of street youths' lives requires close monitoring. After each session with your learner(s), be sure to fill out an abbreviated log (see attached) and turn it in to your agency contact. Be brief, but provide enough detail on the activity to help the counselor have an idea of what the youth is doing.

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[1] Judith C. McGavin, Coordinator of Volunteers for Janis Youth Programs, Inc., Runaway and Homeless Youth Programs. Volunteer training workshop "Communicating with High-Risk Youth," sponsored by the Tri-County Youth Services Consortium in Portland, Oregon, August 18, 1987.

TAKIN' IT TO THE STREETS DAILY LOG

Date: ____________________

Hours: ____________________

Learner(s): ____________________

Activity: ____________________

Volunteer: ____________________

MODULE SIX

Focus Question 1

Outcome

FOCUS QUESTION 1: What contact should I maintain with the agency counselor?

Outcome: An understanding of the parameters of your interactions with the agency counselor.

Instructions:

1. Make a list of the things you'll want to clarify and establish when you meet with your learner's counselor for the first time.

2. What are the circumstances that would warrant further contact with the counselor? And how frequent would that contact be?

MODULE SIX

Focus Question 2

FOCUS QUESTION 2: What contact should I maintain with the project coordinator and other volunteers?

Objective: To clarify the nature and level of support you can expect from the project.

Critical Points

- The project coordinator is a resource for you. Except for the circumstances outlined in Focus Question 1 above, the coordinator should be your first choice in case of questions or problems regarding your work on this project.
- Monthly volunteer tutor meetings will be a source of ongoing training for you, as well as an opportunity to share your experiences, problems and successes.
- These monthly meetings will also provide a forum for you to have a positive impact on the design and implementation of this project's model for effective basic skills training for street youth.

When to Contact the Coordinator

Expect regular contact with the coordinator. During the first month of your work as a volunteer, the coordinator will check in with you at least twice and will also consult with the agency to make sure that everyone is satisfied with the arrangement and that all is going relatively well. You should feel free to contact the coordinator any time (see Rule Number 3, below).

You should turn in your Volunteer Activity Logs to the coordinator weekly during the first month of your volunteer work, then monthly thereafter. The coordinator needs to know what and how you are doing. It is his/her role to facilitate your work, monitoring, encouraging, stimulating, and assisting in any way possible. To do this, he/she needs information about your learner's goals, the activities you plan and carry out, and your careful evaluation of how the activities and techniques are working. The Activity Logs (described in Module Five) are a simple way to provide this information, while at the same time serving as a planning and evaluating device for you.

You should not hesitate to contact the coordinator for consultation on your interactions with your learner(s), teaching techniques and materials, diagnostic methods or problems, questions about your role and responsibilities, or your interactions with the agency. For example, contact the coordinator if:

- **You are uncomfortable with the match of agency or learner(s).** Don't be shy about this. Matching is not always easy to do and you will be far more effective if you are comfortable with the situation in which you are placed.
- **You are having difficulty relating to the youth, but want to find ways to improve the situation.** Especially at first, you may need to talk things through fairly often. Relating to street youth can be overwhelming and totally exhausting, especially when you are not accustomed to them, their ways of interacting, and their life situations. Don't grin and bear it. Talk to the coordinator.
- **You are having difficulty maintaining the youth's interest.** Respond quickly, before you lose him/her altogether. Don't feel inadequate. You are participating in the demonstration of a new approach to the provision of basic skills training to a population that is not always easy to engage and retain. Get help as soon as you sense that you need it.

- o **You are having difficulty finding appropriate materials or methods.** Unless you are a trained teacher, your training to become a tutor has been necessarily rather limited. Don't worry about not knowing everything you need to know. Remember that the process and the relationship you establish are of utmost importance. But ask for help as soon as you feel you have exhausted the materials and methods suggested in this training or if you are having difficulty obtaining materials.

- o **You are having problems directing the basic skills training activities, maintaining the fine line between negotiator and authority figure.** It may take some time for you to feel your way along and learn to negotiate, but lead when necessary. Consulting about this can help.

- o **You are finding serious behavior problems with the youth you are training.** As noted, in any emergency you should not hesitate to contact agency personnel immediately. In less severe situations, you should first discuss what is happening with the coordinator. The coordinator can then help you decide what to do. It may be appropriate for either or both of you to then contact the counselor for a "reality" check on what to expect with the youth.

- o **You have lost your learner(s) completely.** This may well happen--and even without the slightest prior indication (or provocation). You must not take this personally (although it can be very discouraging) and should not let it slow you down in your motivation to continue with this project. Street youth may be in and out of the agency, back and forth from one city to another, even in and out of jail. The day-to-day urgency of their lives and time frames makes any continuity in participation rather miraculous. If you view it that way, you may be better able to hang in there and be there when they show up again. Remember, they may in fact test you this way, expecting that you'll judge them as incapable of commitment, ironically and sadly fulfilling that expectation through their testing behavior. Be patient and constant. Focus on the process. And call the coordinator, for support, or for a new learner.

Monthly Volunteer Meetings

A time to share and learn from each other. As noted earlier, you will be expected to participate in monthly volunteer meetings. Although they may seem time consuming, the experience of hundreds of volunteer programs across the country has proven that regular opportunities for volunteers to share their experiences enrich and sustain the volunteer activity. These meetings will also be your opportunity to help shape and improve the project.

At these meetings you can expect to have the opportunity to:

- o talk about your experiences;
- o hear about the experiences of others;

- discuss strategies for dealing with a variety of interpersonal situations, problems and circumstances;
- discuss tutoring techniques that you or your fellow tutors have found to work;
- discuss techniques to avoid;
- learn about new concerns, issues, methods, and materials.

As you tutor, conduct workshops or provide drop-in help, be alert for areas in which you would like more training or more information. Let your coordinator know. These can then become the special focuses of monthly meetings. Also keep notes to yourself. You may use the Activity Log form for this, especially what worked or what didn't.

A time to gain more formal training. In addition to the usual sharing that will go on, each meeting can be a very real, ongoing training opportunity. Experts can be invited in the areas of:

- assessment;
- specific teaching or tutoring techniques (such as the language experience approach, teaching sightwords, phonics, etc.);
- ways to motivate learners;
- diagnosing special problems (physical and emotional handicaps, learning disabilities);
- how to work with youth who have been physically or sexually abused or who have drug or alcohol problems.

The topics will depend on your needs and interests.

A time to evaluate and shape the project. These meetings will also provide a forum for volunteers to evaluate the project and have a hand in improving the design and implementation of this new approach to basic skills training.

You are the backbone of this project. Your dedication and commitment to providing high quality service to the youth and their counselors will be much appreciated by all, and your very real expertise will make an invaluable contribution to the provision of effective training for street youth, both here and in other communities as well.

MODULE SIX

Focus Question 2

Outcome

FOCUS QUESTION 2: What contact should I maintain with the project coordinator and other volunteers?

Outcome: An understanding of what you can expect from the project and the importance of your role in improving the design and delivery of basic skills training for street youth.

Instructions:

1. Make a list of the types of situations or circumstances in which you would call your coordinator.

2. What can you expect to gain from the monthly volunteer tutor meetings?

3. What might you contribute to these meetings?